



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

WFP EVALUATION

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

Lessons on Self-Reliance for Refugees in the Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe region

Refugee operations make up a large share of WFP's portfolio in the Middle East, providing general food assistance, school feeding and other services to support millions of people to meet their basic food needs. Protracted emergency situations often heighten negative effects on long-term food security and well-being, impacting women and young people in particular.

Protracted crises can also result in 'donor fatigue' with detrimental effects on resource mobilization. Supporting refugees in deploying 'self-reliance' strategies is therefore important to ensure refugees transition away from WFP assistance over time in a sustainable manner.

Commissioned by the WFP Regional Bureau in Cairo (RBC)

WFP AND UNHCR

In 2011, WFP and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed a Global Memorandum of Understanding which led to the creation of the UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub in 2020. WFP and UNHCR had co-authored the [Joint Strategy for Enhancing Self-Reliance in Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Refugee Situations](#) in 2016. Under the WFP RBC Transformation Project, refugee self-reliance was selected among regional Strategic Opportunities in 2021, leading to the recruitment of a self-reliance strategic opportunity lead in November 2022.

FOCUS AND EVIDENCE BASE

This summary presents key findings of evidence generated by recent independent evaluations related to refugee self-reliance. Its evidence base was drawn from 11 centralized and decentralized evaluations conducted over the period 2018-2023 in the RBC Region. It was commissioned by the RBC's Regional Evaluation Unit with the objective of providing country office and regional bureau programme managers with targeted evidence in important parts of RBC's programme portfolio. It is also intended to support programme development and changes to programming on topics of strategic importance for the region.

December 2023

12 KEY FINDINGS

Structured around three dimensions, these findings present primary patterns emerging from the evidence, with relevant recommendations highlighted and main messages.

DIMENSION A. DESIGN AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

1 The potential exists for WFP to contribute to self-reliance through any and all of the existing range of interventions. These types of interventions include: unconditional transfers, conditional transfers for training or assets creation, livelihoods support, or social protection system strengthening.

2 There are systemic barriers - predominantly related to funding conditions - that prevent optimal support to self-reliance. Recommendations suggest that main constraints to increasing contributions to self-reliance are systemic in nature rather than country specific. The short-term nature of funding and the high degree of earmarking are significant barriers to effective self-reliance programming. These are found to have a cascade effect on other elements affecting performance, including limited supervision of implementing partners and limited opportunities for developing partnership strategies or achieve outcome level changes.

3 Evaluations offer limited evidence related to the existence of linkages or layering between unconditional transfer and livelihoods-support type activities or other transition pathways for specific cohorts of refugees. One frequent constraint cited in the reports is the relative scarcity of an articulated programme theory or

theory of change to guide programming for self-reliance. Sustainability strategies with defined graduation and transition pathways are implicit in the programming but inconsistently articulated. The depth of linkages or layering with development actors could also be expanded, as per evaluation recommendations.

4 The quality of vulnerability assessments and targeting tends to be more robust for unconditional transfers and progressively less rigorous across the spectrum of livelihoods-support interventions. For unconditional transfers, targeting strategies focused on the economically vulnerable and were more robust than for resilience activities, which, in addition to vulnerability, required other more complex criteria aiming at integrating the likelihood for beneficiaries to succeed in resilience programmes, like motivation.

5 Monitoring data is used to make course corrections in targeting as well as adjustments of interventions, though this is more prominent in emergency-type interventions and less prominent for others. Recommendations point to internal capacity adjustments, including human resource capacity and knowledge management, that can assist in strengthening the use of monitoring information for decision making. They also note a need for being supported through flexible multi-year funding.

DIMENSION B. CONTRIBUTION TO OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE EFFECTIVENESS

6 Contributions to refugees' food security is generally reported positively. Food and cash transfer interventions are typically measured in relation to food consumption, coping strategies and food expenditure.

7 There is less evidence of interventions improving refugee households' self-reliance as in increasing their ability to independently meet essential needs in a sustainable manner, such as via employment or through the creation of assets. Significant data limitations include the absence of indicators in the corporate results framework that can capture self-reliance beyond food security conceptualizations. Recommendations for resilience programming underline a need for developing a programmatic theory to guide the integration of activities with the elaboration of outcome indicators that can track long-term contributions to resilience. However, there are difficulties for WFP to provide long-term follow-up measurements after project completion to identify the sustainability of the short-term gains. Measuring self-reliance calls for long-term cohort-based post-project measures -- following the same groups over a longer period to be able to identify changes in specific households over time – but these are rarely integrated into WFP monitoring and evaluation approaches at country level.

8 Gender mainstreaming efforts and attention to the differential effects on women are increasing but there is little evidence on adjustments for persons with disabilities. Recommendations around programming from evaluations focus on four dimensions: increasing women's participation, developing training topics relevant for women; developing conditional

requirements that are more relevant for women; and improving childcare options during project implementation. In addition, more can be done for gender mainstreaming, especially through conditional transfers.

9 Effectiveness in promoting self-reliance through employment or self-employment hinges on four characteristics:

- design based on a thorough formal market needs analysis
- training activities connected with subsequent transition support to private sector or government programming
- longer-term engagement with participants
- utilization of tailored or in-depth training

Despite broad convergence on the importance of these enabling elements, they are inconsistently applied by WFP country offices during implementation.

10 There is an inherent tension between WFP's humanitarian mandate and successful programming that supports self-reliance. WFP's humanitarian mandate places pressure on WFP to expand the number of beneficiaries to meet immediate needs, even at the expense of reducing rations, shortening training packages or reducing cycles of asset creation. At the same time, the available evidence, albeit from two countries, suggests that the most positive outcomes come from those resilience interventions that have smaller cohorts with more focused individual investment – assuming favourable national environments - through more intensive recruitment policies, in-depth trainings, provision of financial support or longer-term engagements.

DIMENSION C. CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

11 In most of the countries profiled, WFP has made substantial investments in direct short-term beneficiary assistance through unconditional cash transfers (UCT)/general food assistance (GFA), and a reduced investment in national capacity development. The implicit assumption is that, through strengthening national social protection systems, UCT/GFA beneficiaries can then be transitioned to national social protection systems or integrated into national economic sectors.

12 WFP engagements in strengthening national social protection systems mostly take the form of technical assistance to strengthen the individual capacity within government on food security assessments and targeting. There are fewer cases of WFP advocating for refugee inclusion in national social protection systems or supporting expanded livelihood opportunities. There are concerns regarding the sustainability of this technical support given the high turnover of technical staff in government positions.

BREADTH OF EVIDENCE

This summary of evaluation evidence compiles findings from 11 evaluations, applying the approach and methods set out in WFP's Technical Note on Summaries of Evaluation Evidence:

- Evidence was systematically extracted from evaluations judged to be of at least 'satisfactory' quality in independent assessment, using an analytical framework

reflecting key areas of interest identified at the framing stage.

- Evidence was analysed and clustered around analytical themes, with key patterns and findings identified.
- The resulting report was drafted and commented upon by stakeholders prior to its finalisation in October 2023.



The designations employed and the presentation of material in the map does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever of WFP concerning the legal or constitutional status of any country, territory or sea area, or concerning the delimitation of frontiers.

ANNEX ■ LIST OF DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

- [Evaluation of Egypt WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#)[3]
- [Evaluation of the Jordan country strategic plan \(CSP\) for 2020-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of Lebanon WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#)
- [Evaluation of State of Palestine WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of Algeria WFP Interim Country Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#)[4]
- [Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of The Yemen Crisis](#)
- [Decentralized Evaluation of WFP Livelihoods and Resilience Activities in Lebanon from 2016 to 2019](#)
- [Final Evaluation Report of WFP Turkey Decentralized Evaluation \(Livelihoods and Resilience\)](#)[5]
- [Decentralized Evaluation of WFP's Unconditional Resource Transfer Activity under the Social Safety Net Programme in Palestine January 2018 – December 2020](#)
- [Corporate Emergency Evaluation of the Regional Response to the Syria Crisis](#)
- [Evaluation of WFP's Policy on Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition](#)

WFP EVALUATION

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