



# Impact of Cuts

Outcome of 2023 pilot study: Impact of funding shortfalls on beneficiaries

## CONTEXT

In 2023, WFP saw its largest funding gap in history, compelling the organization to make “hard calls” regarding prioritization. While needs increased by 7% in 2023, major donors reduced their contribution by 41% leading to a funding shortfall of 64%. Projected operational requirements for 2024 amount to US\$ 18.2 billion, while the forecasted contributions are at US\$ 8 billion (see Figure 1).

This gap imposes a sizable strain on WFP Country Offices (COs) who have to implement prioritization in varying ways:



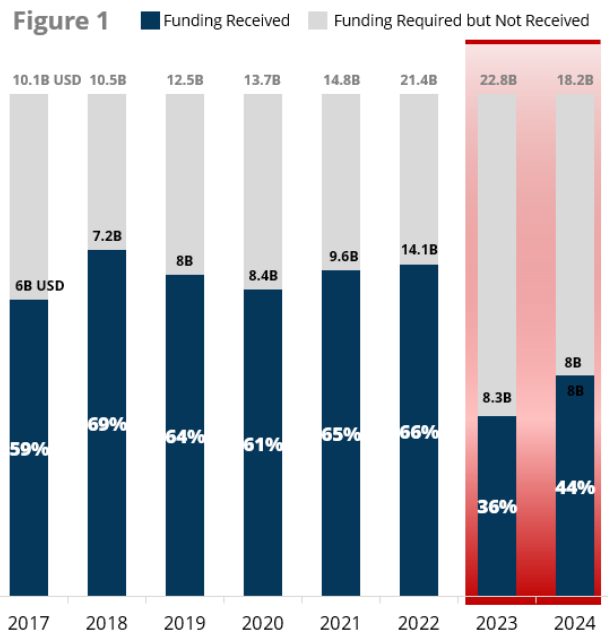
Reduce the ration size of assistance



Reduce the frequency of assistance



Reduce the number of beneficiaries



Sources: WFP Annual Performance Report for 2017-2022, [WFP Dashboard](#), as of May 2024

## METHODOLOGY AND PILOT STUDIES

Many WFP country operations were severely affected by funding shortages, including **Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Malawi** and **Syria**, which participated in a pilot study to assess the impact of assistance cuts on key food security indicators of beneficiary households.

The study makes use of **three strategies to link the estimated results to WFP cuts and capture the full beneficiary experience:**



Carry out data collection on the same beneficiaries before and after the reduction in assistance to compare the impact (**panel data**)



Where prioritization context does not affect all beneficiaries, compare those affected by the cuts to beneficiaries not impacted (**control group**). This way, external factors affecting food security outcomes but not attributable to the cuts can be controlled for (economic shocks, seasonal changes, etc.)



Collect **qualitative data** to capture the context and additional sensitivities experienced as a result from the cuts not captured in quantitative surveys.

This **mixed method analysis design** has been **adapted to the prioritization context** and **realities around the implementation**. Annex 1 summarizes the study design used in each pilot country. For more information around the study results, please refer to the country reports also found in Annex 1.

## IMPACT OF CUTS | RESULTS

### FOOD SECURITY – FOOD CONSUMPTION

This study reveals the extent to which **impacts vary by country**, even those experiencing similar prioritization contexts. WFP cuts **impacted consumption** significantly more for de-prioritized beneficiaries in Syria while all beneficiaries experienced a similar reduction in food consumption in Afghanistan. In **refugee contexts**, cuts in Malawi and Bangladesh had very **diverse impact** depending on the beneficiaries' livelihood opportunities or ability to afford alternative diets<sup>1</sup>.

- Reducing the frequency of assistance for beneficiaries in *Syria* was directly linked to a 2 points reduction in Food Consumption Score (FCS) attributable to WFP cuts.
- Similarly, in *Afghanistan*, both prioritized and excluded beneficiaries experienced reductions of 2 and 3 points in their FCS, respectively.
- Beneficiaries in *Malawi* did not see a significant impact on their FCS from the cuts, as coping strategies were applied to maintain the consumption, follow-up data collection aligned with mango season and fish remained affordable.
- However, in *Bangladesh*, where refugees are almost completely assistance dependent, data of the same households over time shows that the FCS significantly decreased in 2023 (up to 5 points).

### FOOD SECURITY – CONSUMPTION COPING STRATEGIES

Households have adopted a range of **unsustainable and risky coping strategies** in the first months after the cuts. This includes further **rationing** their already low food consumption either by reducing meal diversity, frequency, quality or size. In **Bangladesh**, this particularly affected the **most vulnerable households** (i.e., households headed by women, children, or elderly and those with disabled family members). As a result, several beneficiaries interviewed said that inadequate food consumption and nutrition impacted their physical health, making them feel weak and unable to engage in daily work activities.

### FOOD SECURITY – LIVELIHOOD COPING STRATEGIES

As another coping strategy, evidence points to beneficiaries **using unsustainable alternative funding sources to access food**, increasingly relying on the borrowing of money or credit. For example, in **Afghanistan**, excluded households experienced a 300% rise in credit-based purchases of key food groups. Additionally, The number of refugee households in Malawi who reported selling their non-food assistance to meet their food needs increased by 67% after the cuts (50% as compared to 30% before the cuts).

“ Bangladesh: Female Participant in FGD

*My son was beaten by a neighbor because he borrowed money from him but couldn't return it on time.*

### FOOD SECURITY – COPING STRATEGIES AFFECTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

**In all case studies, children and women** are particularly affected by some unsustainable coping behaviors linked to the cuts. Beneficiaries decreased their spending on health and education to meet food needs after the cuts: as a result, children are withdrawn from schools and forced to work in often harsh conditions. In **Syria**, beneficiaries have also noted a rise in early marriages after the cuts.

“ Syria: Female Participant in FGD

*My child has come to understand the situation and says that he is not hungry and does not want to eat in order to save food for the rest of the family.*

To ensure additional income sources for their families, **women start working in demanding conditions**, often accepting low wages. Coping strategies used by women and children transform household dynamics, as families struggle to secure food, which can spark conflicts and present distinct parenting hurdles<sup>2</sup>. Begging increased after the cuts: in **Afghanistan**, this was especially severe in women-headed homes<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile in **Malawi**, women increasingly engaged in transactional sex to earn money to buy food.

“ Malawi: Female Participant in FGD

*Once WFP cash is over, I will sell my body for 2,000 KW to get food. There is no one here who can help you so you have to exchange your body [...] currently I am in a situation where anyone who wants it, I will accept.*

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the country report for additional limitations on the study performed in the four countries, see Annex 1

<sup>2</sup> Insight from focus group discussions in Syria, but all countries are experiencing similar coping strategies which can impact household dynamics

<sup>3</sup> Women-headed homes in Afghanistan also increasingly ask for charity and borrow money/food from neighbors.

## SOCIAL RELATIONS

**Social relations** among community members are also **affected by the assistance cuts**. For instance, focus group discussions showed increased occurrences of theft and criminal behavior<sup>4</sup>. However, in Afghanistan, an increase in sharing of assistance was noted as beneficiaries cope as a community.

- In **Malawi**, beneficiaries reported a significant increase in theft and engagement in illegal and socially degrading activities.
- In **Bangladesh**, reduced assistance worsened the relationship between Rohingya and the host community in Cox's Bazar.
- In **Afghanistan**, households instead shared the burden of reduced resources as a community: 22% of the prioritized beneficiaries reported willingly sharing their assistance which supports the almost identical food consumption seen for prioritized and excluded households after the cuts.

## INTENTIONS TO MIGRATE

Finally, beneficiaries who have depleted their coping capacities also consider **moving away from their community** in the search for better opportunities elsewhere. In **Syria** and **Bangladesh**, it was reported that young people, including children, move with the goal to financially support their families. Moreover, actual and intended migration through risky and illegal processes has also increased in **Afghanistan**.

### “ Afghanistan: Male Participant in FGD

*Every family is forcing their children to work or travel to Iran; I know many families who do this, and when we look around the city, we see many children collecting bottles from the garbage.*

## SUMMARY

This study has highlighted how, as a result of drastic cuts in food aid, beneficiaries have seen a **dramatic impact on their food security**. Indeed, the increased reliance on **unstainable coping strategies** is a testament of how beneficiaries sacrifice long-term resilience for **short-term survival**.

Needing immediate solutions to cope with this shock and secure food, most **vulnerable family members**, such as children and women, are required to endure. Children being removed from school attests to how this shock will have **long-standing impact** on families.

In the few months after the cuts, households have **relied on coping mechanisms and community support** to sustain food consumption. However, these informal safety nets might also be affected since social relations and level of criminal activities worsened in some countries after the cuts.

The impact seen on food security, coping strategies used and the community all indicate a **reduction in means available for households' resilience**. As such, in the event of additional shocks, the imperative for humanitarian aid could increase to higher level than previously needed, driving the humanitarian community further away from addressing a Zero Hunger mandate.

As noticed within the study, beneficiaries experiencing a reduction in assistance and not finding satisfying livelihood opportunities also consider **moving away from their communities**. This highlights the importance of **monitoring the chain reaction from cuts** over time, but also across borders. Beneficiaries embarking on arduous journeys abroad could substantially increase the **cost for donors** who must support those beneficiaries at their countries' borders.

With alarmingly low funding forecasts, the **need for WFP's assistance will continue to increase** if additional cuts are implemented, as unsustainable coping strategies are used **at the detriment of a household's ability to attain self-sufficiency**. Country Offices experiencing funding cuts would thus benefit from implementing the appropriate study design, enabling them to better align their programmes and prioritization decisions to the impact felt by beneficiaries.

## OTHER IMPACT OF CUTS STUDIES

- Bangladesh ([report](#) – [summary](#))
- Syria ([report](#) – [summary](#))
- Malawi (in progress)
- Afghanistan (in progress)

<sup>4</sup> Noted in Afghanistan, Syria, and Malawi

For questions or more information, please contact: [wfp.evidence@wfp.org](mailto:wfp.evidence@wfp.org)

[Receive our latest evidence, data and analyses](#)

**World Food Programme**  
Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70,  
00148 Rome, Italy - T +39 06 65131  
[wfp.org](http://wfp.org)

## ANNEX 1: PRIORITIZATION CONTEXT AND STUDY DESIGN BY COUNTRY STUDIED



Afghanistan



Bangladesh



Malawi



Syria

### Prioritization Decisions

<b>Reduce ration size</b>	From 75% to 50% ration size across country	From 12USD to 8 USD transfer value for all beneficiaries in Cox's bazar	From 75% to 50% ration size for all beneficiaries in Dzaleka refugee camp	From 46% to 35-43% ration size across country
<b>Reduce frequency</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	Reduced based on vulnerability (4 tiers) in areas controlled by the Government of Syria (GoS). From monthly to bi-monthly in other areas
<b>Reduce beneficiaries</b>	Caseload reduced from 12M to 3.5M beneficiaries across country	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Analysed group</b>	<b>Beneficiaries cut from caseload in September</b>	<b>All Rohingya beneficiaries in Cox's bazar</b>	<b>Beneficiaries in Dzaleka refugee camp</b>	<b>Beneficiaries moving from monthly to bi-monthly assistance</b>

### Study Design Strategies

<b>Panel data collection</b>	Panel data before and after cuts	Panel data with 4 years baseline	Panel data before and after cuts	Panel not available at baseline, thus pooled data used
<b>Control group</b>	Beneficiaries kept in caseload	N/A	N/A	Beneficiaries assisted monthly (no reduction)
<b>Qualitative data</b>	Focus group discussions	Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews	Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews	Focus group discussions
<b>Detailed country reports</b>	<i>In progress</i>	<a href="#">Bangladesh</a>	<i>In progress</i>	<a href="#">Syria</a>

## ANNEX 2: LESSONS LEARNT

### Best Practices | Study design

- Collect panel data from the same households over time whenever possible
- Ensure the questionnaire coding between panel survey rounds is consistent
- Collect data around the same time of year whenever possible, to control for seasonality

### Before the Cuts | Baseline data collection

- Plan for a large oversampling of deprioritized households to account for potential attrition
- Collect data on both prioritized and non-prioritized beneficiaries, also in follow-ups
- Train the enumerators on the background and purpose of the study

### After the Cuts | Follow-up data collection

- Perform multiple post-prioritization data collection exercises to see impact over time
- Ensure the number of days between last distribution and data collection is comparable with baseline situation

### Qualitative Data Collection

- Collect data around the same time of year whenever possible, to control for seasonality
- Collect data both before and after the cuts whenever possible
- Perform both focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs)
- Ensure the quality of the data collected rather than increase the quantity of FGDs
- Modify the standard questionnaire to account for context sensitivities
- Ensure focus group participants are answering on behalf of their prioritization group, not on behalf of their whole community