



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES  
CHANGING LIVES

# Evaluation of Colombia WFP Country Strategic Plan 2021-2024

## CONTEXT

Colombia has a population of 48.3 million people. Despite economic growth, it is one of the most unequal countries in Latin America and in the world, with poverty affecting mostly Afro-descendant and indigenous people that represent, respectively, 9.3 percent and 4.4 percent of the country's total population. Peace accords between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia were signed in 2016, putting an end to six decades of internal armed conflict. In March 2018, WFP declared a level 2 emergency in Colombia due to the large number of migrants arriving from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which contributed to an increase in the need for humanitarian assistance, a situation further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. By October 2022, Colombia had received 2.9 million migrants and, overall, an estimated 7.6 million people had needs related to food security.

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The Country Strategic Plan (CSP) 2021 to 2024 followed the previous cycle from 2017 to 2021, it continued focusing on resilience building and crisis response and was articulated in three strategic outcomes and six activities. To adapt to the evolving context, the needs-based plans for the two CSPs underwent a total of 11 budget revisions, increasing from USD 84 million in 2017 to USD 856 million by June 2023. Funding for resilience activities was sustained overall, but due to the exponential growth of humanitarian funding requirements, it declined as a proportion of the overall budget. At the time of the evaluation, both resilience and crisis response focus areas of the CSP were significantly underfunded, with an average funding level of 40 percent by June 2023.

## OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was conducted between January and November 2023. It served both accountability and learning purposes to inform the design of the new CSP and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Colombia.

It focused on assessing the results of the CSP 2021–2024 but also provided a strategic overview of work and results under the previous CSP, to analyze continuity and consistency of programming and responsiveness to evolving needs and priorities.

## KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

### Strategic positioning and alignment

The CSP was evidence based and grounded in WFP's comparative advantages in logistics capacity, field presence, expertise in food and nutrition security and cash-based transfers. It was aligned with national priorities, the UNSDCF for Colombia and WFP's strategic plan. Its interventions were relevant and responsive to evolving needs, focusing on the most vulnerable people, with special attention directed to women, indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. However, some opportunities were missed for making greater use of the knowledge and experience of field sub-offices to further tailor interventions to local conditions.

The evaluation also noted that responsiveness to new funding opportunities and government requests allowed WFP to widen its range of interventions, but also led to fragmentation in its geographical and thematic coverage.

### Results

WFP reached an average of 1.5 million people per year from 2019 to 2022, including Colombian citizens affected by natural disasters and violence, and migrants. It distributed cash, vouchers or ready-to-eat food according to specific needs of different target groups.

It also provided technical assistance for the inclusion of migrants in the national registration system for people experiencing poverty and vulnerability, which is instrumental to access the labour market and connect to the Colombian social protection system.

The enabling environment for food and nutrition security was also strengthened with WFP support in three key areas:

- increased visibility of food security and nutrition objectives in the new national development plan (2022)

- integration of the zero hunger approach (and the human right to food) into the activities of the new ministry responsible for equity
- greater government investments in support of rural women, particularly through the initiatives of the rural reform policy
- Coverage of national school meals programmes was also expanded, with WFP acting as a Government contractor for procurement and distribution services.

The CSP contributed to building resilience and to socio-economic integration, by strengthening livelihoods and supporting entrepreneurial activities. Beneficiaries also reported positive effects of WFP projects on community relations, group solidarity and intra-household dynamics.

Despite several successful projects, however, development-oriented interventions were very small in relation to needs, and relatively fragmented from a thematic and geographic point of view.

More broadly, strengthening the humanitarian, development and peace nexus within the CSP proved challenging, owing to the disproportionately larger scale of humanitarian assistance vis a vis the small scale of development programming.

### Contribution to cross-cutting issues

WFP made progress in mainstreaming gender and ethnicity into project design. However, the gender equality approach continues to be dependent on ad-hoc decisions and resource availability. The CSP adhered to the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, particularly as relates to targeting and prioritization. No protection concerns were observed. Mechanisms for beneficiary feedback are being set-up, but it remains a challenge to keep people informed about WFP's programming, especially in more remote areas.

### Sustainability

There are positive prospects for political and technical sustainability given strong alignment of interventions with national priorities and existing national capacities, although there are risks of falling into capacity substitution with limited prospects for sustainability, if no transition strategies are planned, particularly as relates to WFP service provision. Risks for sustainability also relate to the short duration of interventions and the availability of domestic resources to ensure continuity to consolidate resilience results.

### Efficient use of resources

WFP crisis response was agile, but delays were observed due to inefficiencies in internal processes. WFP was able to reach vulnerable communities, including women, indigenous people, and afro-descendants in hard-to-reach locations, although resilience interventions were limited in relation to needs. Donor funding preferences did not always correspond to evidence-based needs assessments, which contributed to fragmentation in implementation and constraining internal synergies. Cost per modality improved throughout the CSP. CBT prove more cost-efficient with a cost per beneficiary of USD 4.54, compared to USD 12.31 for in-kind transfers. Direct support costs increased over time, possibly linked to growth in staff numbers.

### Key factors explaining performance

High earmarking at activity level continues to limit flexibility, and different donor preferences for geographic and thematic prioritization risks impeding an integrated approach to local

development. Moreover, the generally short duration of grants clashes with the longer-term approach needed when engaging in development programming.

To respond to the increase in humanitarian needs, WFP had to absorb unprecedented growth in resources and operational capacity. The country office successfully achieved the massive expansion required to transition from a small office to one of the largest WFP offices in the world, although this transformation posed challenges for the efficiency of internal processes and the systematization of lessons learned. Particularly, the hiring of personnel linked to individual projects allowed for rapid expansion of the country office but posed challenges for talent retention, which negatively affected institutional memory and consistency in implementation.

The rigidity of the CSP's line of sight and the corresponding management structures also limited internal coherence, and the corporate results framework was of limited utility in tracking and reporting on progress and in strategic decision-making during programme implementation.

### Overall assessment

The CSP proved to be highly relevant to circumstances in Colombia and responsive to evolving needs and priorities. Despite challenges in meeting the scale of needs, it complemented the Government's response to multiple humanitarian crises with WFP successfully reaching the most vulnerable and isolated communities using its comparative advantages in logistics support and scale of field presence. The CSP also contributed to results in sectors that can be considered non-traditional for WFP, such as social cohesion and socio-economic integration, within the framework of national efforts to promote integrated local development and peace. WFP has achieved relevant results in those areas and is gathering significant learning from its experience. Due to the limited scale of the interventions, however, these results act as important demonstrators of potential, but have not yet had significant national level effects. A key challenge ahead will be ensuring continuity of resilience-building initiatives and adequately generating and managing knowledge to advocate for and inform scale up, in close dialogue with national and international partners.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** Develop a conceptual and strategic framework for each thematic area of intervention, based on WFP's comparative advantages and changes in the operational environment.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop a strategy for strengthening national capacities that clearly defines the role of WFP in a middle-income country such as Colombia.

**Recommendation 3:** Define clear criteria for setting the thematic and geographical focus of interventions so as to avoid the dispersion of effort and optimize internal synergies. In defining the criteria, consider a systematization exercise.

**Recommendation 4:** Generate evidence from analysis and the systematization of lessons learned from the two CSPs.

**Recommendation 5:** Conduct a review of internal processes with a view to improving internal coordination and expediting the implementation of programmes.

**Recommendation 6:** Standardize design and management processes with a view to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the country office's mobilization efforts.