



WFP EVALUATION



World Food Programme

**SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES**

Flexible Systems-Effective Responses?

Regional Evaluation of WFP's contribution to Shock-Responsive Social Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean (2015-2022)

Summary Evaluation Report



INTRODUCTION

This **thematic evaluation**, commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP), examines its work in **Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)** from **2015 to 2022**. It covers WFP's **12 country offices and the Caribbean multi-country office**. Together, these comprise 34 countries and overseas territories.¹

The evaluation's main objectives were related to learning and accountability. With respect to learning, the evaluation aimed to understand high-level outcomes and extract lessons and good practices. Regarding accountability, it identified the results achieved from implementing the SRSP framework and pillar of the Regional Social Protection Strategy (2019) by WFP in LAC. The evaluation assessed the **coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and gender and inclusion aspects** of WFP's engagement in SRSP.

The evaluation is intended to be used by WFP Country Offices, Regional Bureau, and the Social Protection unit in the Headquarters to inform future programming and partnership strategies and to identify areas of focus for WFP's engagement in strengthening the responsiveness of social protection systems. External users include governments and regional bodies, as well as UN agencies, multilateral organizations, bilateral donors, and civil society collaborating with WFP on strengthening social protection systems.

¹ Including Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela, while the Caribbean multi-country office covers 22 countries and overseas territories, all of which are classified as small island developing States, namely Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curaçao, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Maarten, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos Islands.

CONTEXT



Latin America and the Caribbean are characterized by significant **socio-economic disparities and exposure to diverse shocks**. These include climate-related shocks, economic crises, migration waves, and public health emergencies. Vulnerable populations in the region face increased risks during these crises, requiring the development of social protection systems responsive to these shocks.



1.4 MILLION PEOPLE

The number of **people in poverty or extreme poverty has increased** since 2015, with an acceleration in 2020 due to COVID-19. In addition, poverty levels in the region vary greatly due to persistent inequality.

For example, Indigenous groups (9.8% of the region's population) experience a significantly higher level of poverty compared to non-Indigenous and non-Afrodescendant people (21.4 pp higher).²

In 2021, **1.4 million persons were displaced internally** in the region.

Between 2010 and 2021, 76.9% of these displacements were related to **climate shocks** such as hurricanes and floods, while 23.1% were caused by conflicts and violence.³

Out of 50 countries most prone to climate-related shocks in the world, 13 are in Latin America and the Caribbean, making it one of the region's most vulnerable to climate change. Between 2001 and 2022, the average number of extreme climate-related weather events doubled compared to the previous two decades.⁴

Figure 1. Recent shocks and climate-related disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean

Hurricane	Earthquake	Wildfire	Volcanic Eruption
<p>Matthew (2016): Affected Haiti, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Jamaica.</p> <p>Irma & Maria (2017): Caused damage across the Caribbean</p> <p>Dorian (2019): Affected the Bahamas</p> <p>Eta & Iota (2020): Severe flooding and landslide in Central America</p> <p>Lisa & Fiona (2022): Affected Belize, Dominican Republic and Guadeloupe</p>	<p>2020: Struck northwest Ecuador's coast</p> <p>2021: Struck the Tiburon peninsula in Haiti</p>	<p>Atacama (2021): Burned for several weeks causing widespread damage to the ecosystem and communities in Chile, Peru and Bolivia</p>	<p>La Soufrière (2021): Displaced 21% of the population of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines</p> <p>Fuego (2022): Caused significant ashfall and evacuation in Guatemala</p>

Figure 1 gives an overview of the most significant recent shocks and climate-related disasters in the region. These events heavily impacted crop yields, livelihoods, and food security. The Caribbean has been particularly hard hit.



The region is recognized for having a **diversity of national social protection systems**, characterized by different levels of development. Some countries, such as **Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador**, may be considered mature, with relatively efficient administrative capacities, operational and regulatory processes, and extensive coverage.⁵ On the other hand, in the **Caribbean and Central American sub-regions**, many countries have inadequate social protection legislation, unclear or overlapping targeting criteria, limited information management systems and low coverage.

As part of its commitment to addressing food insecurity and improving nutrition, since 2015 **WFP has been working on strengthening social protection systems and its responsiveness to shocks** in the region.

² Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). (2022). Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean 2022 (LC/PUB.2022/15-P). Santiago, ECLAC. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/48519-social-panorama-latin-america-and-caribbean-2022-transforming-education-basis>.

³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. (2022). Global Internal Displacement Database. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>.

⁴ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD et al. 2022) [Online]. Available from: <https://www.oecd.org/dev/americas/economic-outlook/>.

⁵ Rodolfo Beazley, Ana Solórzano, and Valentina Barca. (2019). Study on Shock-Responsive Social Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean: Summary of Key Findings and Policy Recommendations. OPM and WFP.

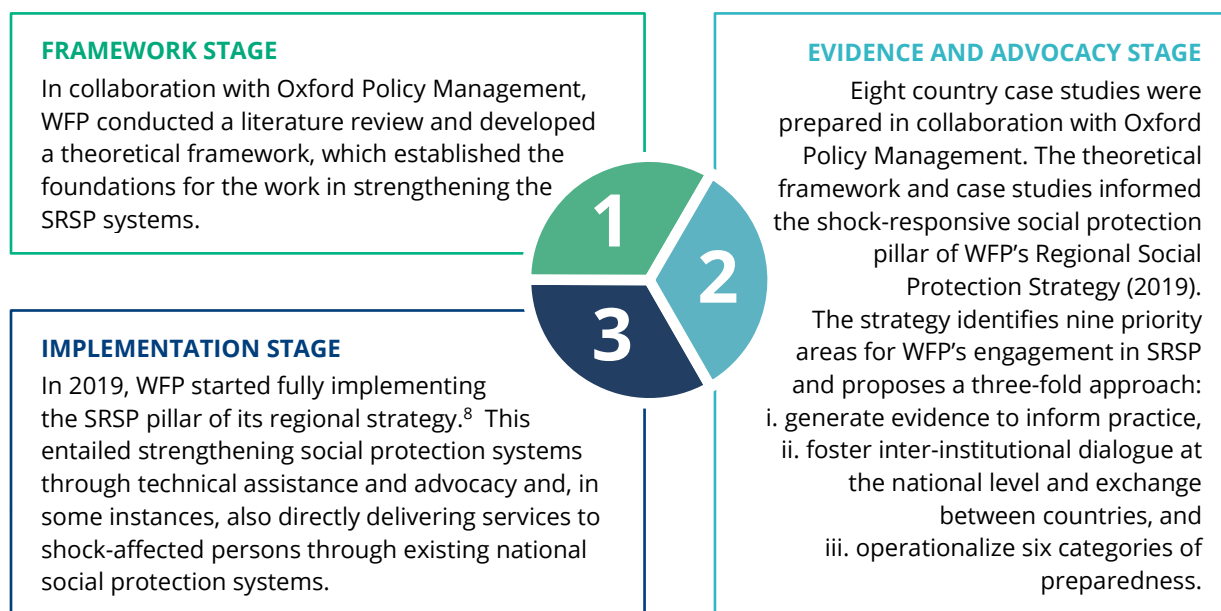
EVALUATION SUBJECT

Social protection, as defined by the Social Protection Inter-agency Cooperation Board, encompasses “policies and programmes aimed at preventing, and protecting people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion”, which “can be provided through social insurance, tax-funded social benefits, social assistance services, public works programmes,” among other schemes.⁶

Social protection systems are generally established to reduce chronic poverty and support individuals throughout their life cycles.⁷ However, people also face covariate shocks that threaten their well-being, including food security.

The gaps in responses have motivated **WFP to work on the shock-responsiveness of social protection systems in two ways:** i. complementing government efforts through direct implementation whenever required in contexts of limited capacities and resources, and ii. supporting countries in strengthening their capacities through technical assistance and advocacy.

WFP’s engagement in strengthening shock-responsiveness of social protection systems in LAC was conducted in **three stages**, some of which overlap in time:



WFP’s engagement in shock-responsive social protection is part of its broader work on social protection. It is linked to concrete areas of work at the country level, embedded within the specific WFP Country Strategic Plans. In consultation with WFP Social Protection staff, the evaluation team constructed a theory of change for this work based mainly on the WFP 2019 Regional Social Protection Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean.

⁶ Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B). (2019). Collaborating for Policy Coherence and Development Impact. New York, SPIAC-B.

⁷ Rodolfo Beazley, Ana Solórzano, and Valentina Barca. (2019). Study on Shock-Responsive Social Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean: Summary of Key Findings and Policy Recommendations. OPM and WFP.

⁸ As mentioned above, some of these phases overlapped. Hence the first time a social protection system was used to respond to a shock was in 2016, through the Ecuador earthquake response. From 2019, WFP began to include these efforts more systematically in its regional strategy.

METHODOLOGY

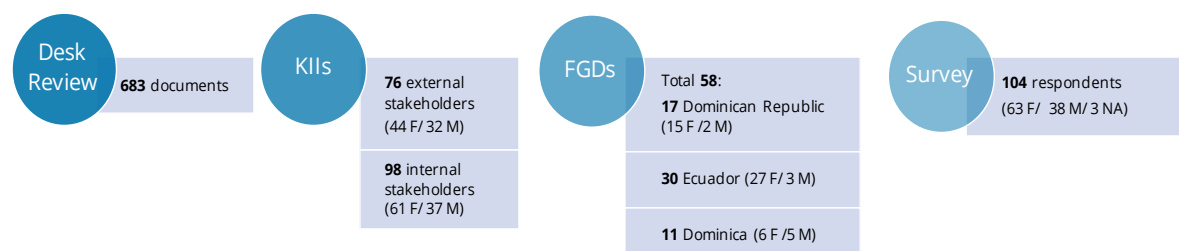
The evaluation centred on assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, sustainability, and gender and inclusion aspects of the work, and sought to answer four key questions which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation questions

Criteria	Evaluation questions
Effectiveness, Gender and Inclusion	EQ1. To what extent has WFP's engagement in SRSP in the region contributed to stronger, more equitable and inclusive national social protection systems?
Effectiveness and Sustainability	EQ2. What are the key factors that have influenced WFP's engagement in SRSP in the region in general and with regards to the sustainability of the achievements?
Effectiveness and Efficiency	EQ3. Which modalities of engagement deployed by WFP were the most effective and efficient in support of positive outcomes in SRSP in view of different contexts?
Coherence	EQ4. To what extent did WFP's role in advancing SRSP programming in the Latin American and Caribbean region contribute to WFP's corporate vision and approach to Social Protection and wider discussion on the subject?

The evaluation used **mixed-methods** and followed a **utilization-focused and theory-based approach**, using **outcome mapping** to assess WFP's contribution to strengthening shock-responsiveness of social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean. **Qualitative data** was gathered through field visits (**Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and the Caribbean multi-country office**), desk review, key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Quantitative data was gathered through an **online survey** (response rate 38%).

Figure 2. Data collection methods



In addition to undertaking a comprehensive document review, the team engaged in interviews with a wide range of stakeholders. These included WFP staff (country offices, Regional Bureau, Headquarters), government representatives, partners from United Nations and international financial institutions, civil society organizations, academic experts, and programme participants. Focus group participants were selected from existing lists of clients of the social protection programmes. Consideration was given to ensuring a diversity of participants, including persons with disabilities when possible.

Analytical rigour was ensured through the use of **content analysis, quantitative data analysis and comparative analysis**. Triangulation was employed to ensure credible and unbiased conclusions, using a mix of primary and secondary data sources. **Major methodological limitations** consisted of the absence of a theory of change or logical framework to comprehensively capture WFP's involvement in SRSP in the region, along with monitoring data limitations. Additionally, the evaluation was challenged by staff turnover both within WFP and among governmental counterparts. Efforts were made to contact and interview these key stakeholders to ensure continuity and accuracy of information.

FINDINGS

EFFECTIVENESS, GENDER AND INCLUSION TO WHAT EXTENT HAS WFP'S ENGAGEMENT IN SRSP IN THE REGION CONTRIBUTED TO STRONGER, MORE EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS?

The evaluation analysed the contributions of WFP in (a) raising awareness on social protection and preparedness; (b) strengthening national social protection systems through downstream and upstream work; (c) response to different types of shocks; (d) response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation also analysed emerging positive and negative effects of WFP's Shock-Responsive Social Protection activities and the extent to which they promoted gender equality, equity, inclusion of indigenous populations, people living with disabilities and social inclusion in general.

Raising awareness of the role of social protection in shock preparedness and response: WFP's evidence-generating initiatives have strategically positioned the organization as a leader in shock-responsive social protection. Through high-level events, south-south and triangular cooperation, and partnership-building, WFP has significantly enhanced its credibility and impact in this domain. Although the evidence generated by WFP shows varying levels of uptake (e.g., due to political context or limited resources), WFP has played a crucial role in creating a comprehensive framework for its engagement in strengthening responsiveness of social protection systems to shocks. The evidence produced has spurred extensive discussions among diverse stakeholders, fostered relationships with governmental entities, and led to identification of specific opportunities and priorities to enhance social protection systems and their shock-responsiveness. Survey responses from external stakeholders demonstrated WFP's strength in acting on evidence it generated. Overall, 84.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that WFP had effectively used the evidence generated to engage with its partners on SRSP. Also, 79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that evidence generated by WFP had contributed to a shared shock-responsive social protection strategy between national government and other key actors.

Strengthening national social protection systems (downstream and upstream work): WFP's contribution to the strengthening of national social protection systems is anchored in the WFP Country Capacity Strengthening framework, which is structured around three domains: i. enabling environment, ii. institutional capacity strengthening, and iii. individual capacity strengthening. Overall, greater contributions have been made towards strengthening individual capacities (e.g., training on beneficiary targeting and vulnerability assessments) and institutional capacities (e.g., institutionalization of the Emergency Bonus in the Dominican Republic and supporting the adaptation of the national school feeding programme in Peru). Interviews with government officials provided evidence that the knowledge acquired during training has been applied. WFP also provided policy development support across the region and progress in terms of improving the enabling environment has been made in some countries. In Haiti, for example, WFP helped develop two essential policy elements of the social protection system which enabled a World Bank project to move forward in developing a social protection strategy and a social registry. However, there is limited evidence of successful advocacy work to influence the fiscal space and increase national budgets for social protection. Where vulnerable persons could not access national social protection systems, WFP also complemented government efforts by providing direct assistance to migrants in Colombia and Ecuador.

Response to different types of shocks: WFP's engagement in SRSP has clearly contributed to expanded coverage, both through temporary and more permanent expansions of the number of social protection assistance recipients, as well as through payment top-ups to existing recipients. Regarding response speed, there were mixed results. While countries like Belize managed swift cash assistance post-disasters with WFP's support, others faced delays due to administrative hurdles, lack of preparedness, or donor funding timing.

As systems are made up of a multitude of different actors, relationships, procedures, and tools which all need to perform together to ensure maximum effectiveness and efficiency, outcomes can vary considerably. While in some countries major milestones have been met and institutionalized, further support and advocacy remain relevant in others. Concerning the adequacy of assistance, in some countries where WFP works and aligns with the transfer values set by national systems, recent inflation results in the transfer values being perceived as low. Lastly, there is no standardized monitoring framework to assess the effectiveness of WFP's contributions across the board.

Survey responses from external stakeholders demonstrated WFP's strength in applying acting on evidence it generated. Overall, 84.2% percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that WFP had effectively used the evidence generated to engage with its partners on SRSP. Also, 79% percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that evidence generated by WFP had contributed to a shared shock-responsive social protection strategy between national government and other key actors.

Response to COVID-19 pandemic: WFP's response to this crisis entailed a strategic shift of financial and human resources towards assisting governments in rapidly addressing the emergency through the existing national social protection systems. The effectiveness of this response was underpinned by prior investments in understanding these systems, which enabled the identification of gaps and opportunities. The response strategies of governments in Latin America and the Caribbean, which WFP supported, included adaptations to school feeding programmes, vertical expansions of social protection initiatives (payment top-ups), and assistance to new beneficiaries (horizontal expansion). WFP's pivotal role in introducing operational innovations for beneficiary identification and enrolment, as well as its exploration of electronic payment methods, further highlighted its valuable contribution to addressing the pandemic's challenges through social protection measures.

Emerging positive and negative effects: WFP's engagement in SRSP in the region yielded several unexpected effects. The **positive unintended effects** included its contribution to the strengthening and formalization of social protection systems through more transparent and objective beneficiary identification processes. In addition, the digitalisation of payments has promoted financial inclusion, allowing previously unbanked groups, especially women, to access essential financial services. It also increased recipients' awareness of available programmes and entitlements, improving their overall well-being and ability to access critical services.

On the other hand, the evaluation team also identified several **negative unintended consequences**. Some beneficiaries felt that cash transfer values were insufficient, especially in the context of inflation and rapid post-disaster price increases. Furthermore, although progress has been aided by financing the issuance of identity documents in countries like Haiti, there is a concern about possibly creating a dependency on aid agencies to provide basic services to the population. The evaluation team stated that these costs may be justifiable if accompanied by a longer-term sustainability strategy, which is a standard practice for WFP.

Promotion of gender equality, equity, inclusion of Indigenous populations, people living with disabilities and social inclusion in general: WFP's initial involvement in shock-responsive social protection did not have a clear focus on mainstreaming gender and inclusion. However, over time and in collaboration with partners, WFP has been exploring the integration of these dimensions. While some country offices have made progress in identifying and addressing gender-specific needs and considering vulnerable populations in programme design and beneficiary targeting, there is still room for improvement in terms of systematic and consistent inclusion of all affected groups. Effective and inclusive shock-responsive social protection initiatives have been demonstrated through collaboration with other organizations and the use of objective criteria in targeting. Monitoring and evaluation play a crucial role in assessing the outcomes and effectiveness of SRSP activities beyond the initial targeting phase. The evaluation team identified that there remains room for improvement in terms of adequately monitoring gender differences and exclusion of specific groups, especially considering that needs constantly evolve following a crisis.

EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

WHAT ARE THE KEY FACTORS THAT HAVE INFLUENCED WFP'S ENGAGEMENT IN SRSP IN THE REGION IN GENERAL AND WITH REGARDS TO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS?

To determine the effectiveness and the sustainability of WFP's work in SRSP, the evaluation team analysed (a) the key enablers, barriers, and trade-offs in WFP's engagement; (b) the sustainability of the achievements; and (c) the lessons learned and good practices.

Key enablers, barriers, and trade-offs of WFP's engagement: Political will and ownership were key drivers of the success of WFP's work in social protection in the region. Enablers also include the development of clear policy frameworks and contingency plans, as well as the allocation of resources (human and financial) by governments to lead and support the work. In addition, inter-institutional coordination and exchange of good practices played an important role. Sub-regional platforms significantly facilitated this process. Examples include the engagement with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). Further enablers included a multi-year financial investment in the form of funding from the headquarters that allowed developing internal capacities in social protection, a management that supported engagement in systems strengthening, WFP advocacy with the right ministries, as well as trainings and workshops targeting key decision-makers.

At the same time, **WFP's engagement in social protection faced several barriers**, including political and administrative instability. That instability disrupted programme continuity and collaboration, as evidenced in Dominica and Ecuador. In some countries, the lack of engagement and competing interest from government ministries slowed collaboration. Also, the limited decision-making ability of government technical staff, and the lack of clear articulation of national policies with identified roles for both Disaster Risk Management and Social Protection ministries created challenges for effective implementation. Another barrier was the lack of alignment of tools and approaches proposed by international agencies. That sometimes exacerbated the limited attention government counterparts could give to these actors. This could have been prevented by enhanced coordination. Finally, an internal limitation was staff turnover and human and financial resources constraints.

WFP's engagement in shock-responsive social protection faced **strategic trade-offs** between expanding assistance coverage to more households and providing higher nominal amounts to already existing social protection programme beneficiaries.

*WFP's engagement in shock-responsive social protection faced **strategic trade-offs** between expanding assistance coverage to more households and providing higher nominal amounts to already existing social protection programme beneficiaries.*

Sustainability of the achievements: The significant and varied achievements made were accelerated in part by the COVID-19 pandemic response. The sustainability of WFP's efforts to strengthen the shock-responsiveness of social protection systems in the region faces several challenges. In many countries, the proposed systems adaptations were not fully institutionalized. That makes them fragile and vulnerable to changes in governments, national priorities, or fiscal situations. Change to systems can easily end up causing significant setbacks. While WFP's work on disaster risk financing may lead to longer-term financial sustainability, there are also opportunities for WFP to intervene at the local/municipal level to help improve the sustainability of shock-responsive social protection systems. Finally, the evaluation team has also identified that work on standard operating procedures for SRSP can yield longer-term benefits through a well-defined and predictable process. This has been already applied in the Dominican Republic, Peru, Guatemala and in several other countries covered by the Caribbean multi-country office.

EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

WHICH MODALITIES OF ENGAGEMENT DEPLOYED BY WFP WERE THE MOST EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT IN SUPPORT OF POSITIVE OUTCOMES IN SRSP IN VIEW OF DIFFERENT CONTEXTS?

WFP employed multiple strategies to enhance the shock-responsiveness of social protection systems in the region. In countries with pre-existing strong social protection systems, generally more focus was required on normative frameworks and coordination to enable the connection with Disaster Risk Management actors. In countries with less developed pre-existing social protection systems, WFP has been using a range of entry points (see Figure 3). Across contexts, coordination and alignment among stakeholders was vital for achieving efficient and effective outcomes. In this context, the analysis focused on (a) adaptation strategies in different countries and crisis contexts; (b) resources for the implementation of different elements of the SRSP framework; and (c) the adequacy of resources to achieve the expected results.

Figure 3. Modalities of engagement on SRSP.



Adaptation strategies in different countries and crisis contexts: WFP's work in SRSP proved to be effective in different national contexts and in response to climate-related shocks as well as health emergencies. Specifically in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the response was provided through technical assistance and funding support. In addition, in cases such as Ecuador and Colombia, WFP's SRSP work was adapted to aid the migrant population. However, several interviewed stakeholders with knowledge of WFP's support to the migration response suggested that WFP could be doing more to address the hardships that migrants are facing in various countries. The Caribbean multi-country office and Colombia country office demonstrated the many opportunities that exist to support countries with model legislation that can pave the way to universal social protection coverage for climate and other migrants. The contexts that presented the greatest challenges in advancing with shock-responsiveness of social protection systems were those where there was institutional weakening and a lack of political will or low priority assigned to the topic.

Resources for the implementation of different elements of the SRSP framework: In terms of human resources, there has been a substantial increase over time in the number of WFP staff that integrate SRSP elements in their work, including from units beyond social protection. The number of WFP staff that dedicates more than 50% of their time to social protection related activities increased by 150% between 2021 and 2023. WFP made a significant financial investment in evidence generation, events, training, and project seed funding to promote shock-responsive social protection. Approximately US\$685,300 of the Regional Bureau budget has been invested in training and high-level events related to SRSP. Among the key programmes and seminars were "Social Protection 4 Zero Hunger" (2016), SRSP seminars in Peru (2017 and 2019), and training developed by the Economic Policy Research Institute (2021). Furthermore, between 2016 and 2020, the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean invested US\$600,544 in contracting Oxford Policy Management to develop case studies and theoretical and conceptual documents related to shock-responsive social protection. These investments were enabled by WFP internal funding mechanisms and were the result of a managerial prioritization at the regional level which resulted in approximately US\$400,000 going annually to finance staff and activities.

Adequacy of resources to achieve the expected results: WFP has made significant strides in recruiting and training staff for its work on shock-responsive social protection. However, reliance on technical staff contracted on a short-term basis has led to the departure of several skilled professionals. This has meant a loss of valuable knowledge within the organization, and has limited the development of long-term plans. Nevertheless, drawing on consultants has also had advantages, including that WFP has been able to tap into highly technical expertise that is not available within the organization. In addition, WFP has been able to attract talent relatively quickly, thus increasing its ability to respond to shocks.

The number of WFP staff that dedicates more than 50 percent of their time to social protection related activities increased by 150% between 2021 and 2023.

There are also perceived gaps in the adequacy of financial resources and sustainability of investments. Only 45% of respondents felt that there was adequate funding to support the institutionalization of SRSP. In addition, WFP is frequently perceived as an emergency response actor rather than an entity dedicated to strengthening social protection systems. Both elements pose challenges to the effective implementation of the SRSP pillar of the Regional Social Protection Strategy and to propelling institutional changes.

COHERENCE

TO WHAT EXTENT DID WFP'S ROLE IN ADVANCING SRSP PROGRAMMING IN THE LAC REGION CONTRIBUTE TO WFP'S CORPORATE VISION AND APPROACH TO SOCIAL PROTECTION AND WIDER DISCUSSION ON THE SUBJECT?

WFP's role in strengthening shock-responsiveness of national social protection systems in LAC has contributed to WFP's corporate vision and approach to social protection. These contributions are analysed from two perspectives: (a) coherence with internal strategies, initiatives, and tools at different levels of the organization; and (b) coherence with other stakeholders' strategies for advancing shock-responsiveness of social protection systems in Latin American and the Caribbean.

Coherence with internal strategies, initiatives, and tools: The regional and corporate social protection strategies are aligned with respect to the use of social protection to address shocks. However, the corporate strategy has steered away from using the term 'SRSP'. WFP's approach to this work has been influenced significantly by the experience in Latin America and the Caribbean, though it was not the only factor. Still, the robustness and scale of the SRSP work in the LAC region has legitimized WFP's mandate in this area for other regions. Lessons learned have, to some extent, informed the work beyond LAC, although the sharing of experiences across regions remained ad hoc.

Coherence with the strategies of other stakeholders: WFP is recognized for its strong comparative advantage in cash-based transfers, in-kind assistance, disaster risk financing mechanisms, digitalisation, and school feeding. Its distinctive value also lies in its operational agility, logistics capabilities, and expertise in identifying vulnerable groups through assessments. Yet, local presence seems more directed toward emergency response than capacity strengthening of local authorities. In addition, WFP's innate strength in linking social protection and disaster risk management is utilized to varying degrees across the region.

WFP's collaboration with development and humanitarian partners on SRSP in LAC is evident. At the regional level, WFP has played an important role in inter-agency working groups. However, the absence of a formal coordination mechanism on SRSP is a limiting factor. UN collaboration varies by country, with the Adaptive Social Protection Working Group in the Dominican Republic highlighted as a positive example of WFP's contribution to strengthened coordination. Closer collaboration with international financial institutions is a growing trend, offering opportunities for broader partnerships.

WFP's approach to this work has been influenced significantly by the experience in Latin America and the Caribbean.



CONCLUSIONS

Results, Challenges and Opportunities: WFP's engagement in SRSP in the LAC region has shown positive effects in improving coverage, transparency, and financial inclusion. WFP has been able to build on its comparative advantages. Moreover, good practices such as collaboration with sub-regional institutions, gender equality efforts, and leveraging school feeding programmes, have shown promising results. Challenges include external factors like varying government engagement and reception capacity, as well as internal aspects such as staff turnover and resource constraints. While recognizing the need to tailor its support, WFP's operational SRSP Guidance offers ways to structure engagement with counterparts at the country level. Further opportunities lie in advocacy work for national budgets to be allocated for social protection.

Evidence-based leadership, relationship-building, and coordination: WFP's evidence generation and related policy advocacy efforts have played a significant role in raising awareness about social protection and shock-preparedness and response. This has led to improved coordination and partnerships with governments and other key stakeholders. It has also led, to varying degree across countries, to a stronger positioning of the topic on national agendas. However, as more stakeholders engage in SRSP, there is a growing demand for further strengthening this coordination and alignment to foster synergies and avoid duplication and conflicting demands on government resources.

Organizational adaptability and capacity strengthening: WFP has significantly increased resources deployed for SRSP activities, including staff recruitment, training, evidence generation, advocacy, and project seed funding. The organization's adaptability and recognition of the growing importance of SRSP are evident. However, initially strategic reliance on short-term contracts has limitations. Therefore, moving forward, a staffing mix that includes national professional positions will be important to enhance staff retention and financial sustainability.

Harmonizing SRSP Strategies: There is a considerable alignment between the Regional Social Protection Strategy (2019) and the Corporate Social Protection strategy. However, at the corporate level, WFP rightly avoided using the term 'Shock-Responsive Social Protection' as it co-exists with other terms which in certain cases in LAC confused governments and partners. The pioneering role of the LAC region in advancing SRSP within WFP has influenced the corporate approach, but there is room to enhance cross-regional exchanges.

Integration of gender and inclusion towards enhanced effectiveness: WFP's SRSP engagement has effectively responded to different types of shocks and expanded coverage and inclusivity in social protection measures. However, improvements are needed in systematically and consistently including affected groups, such as persons with disabilities. Active two-way communication with beneficiaries and collaboration with other organizations can enhance effectiveness in this regard.

GOOD PRACTICES & LESSONS LEARNED

- WFP's investment in strengthening shock-responsiveness of social protection systems **requires a longer time frame** compared to humanitarian programming. To ensure adaptability in this process, it is important to consider how changes in governments, leadership, and policies can affect SRSP.
- To strengthen responsiveness to shocks in the long run, understanding of the individual systems is key.
- **Collaboration with sub-regional institutions** such as the Caribbean Community, Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, and Organization of Eastern Caribbean States enhances shock-responsiveness of social protection systems. It does this by strengthening the capacity of these institutions for disaster risk management, for developing broader frameworks, and for setting standards. It has a multiplier effect on WFP's engagement when frameworks and standards are being adopted by member states.
- Supporting **coordination efforts and institutionalizing coordination platforms** are crucial elements in strengthening responsiveness to shocks of national social protection systems. An example of this good practice was supporting government leadership and coordination among key actors in the social protection working group in the Dominican Republic.
- **Close engagement with** partners from the **national governments** and responding to their emerging needs is key to **fostering ownership and enhancing uptake** of new solutions (e.g., electronic payment cards).
- WFP's field presence, satellite offices, and operational capacity can enhance shock-responsiveness at the local level through community-level preparedness and response mechanisms. An example of work at local level is the support of community kitchens in Peru.
- Supporting governments in the systematic use of **participatory approaches, consultative assessments, and diverse perspectives** to address the needs of marginalized groups in accessing social protection systems and services is key to **enhancing their inclusiveness**. For example, directly involving women in the design and implementation of cash transfer programs in Haiti promoted gender equality and fostered financial inclusion through an increased understanding of the barriers women face in accessing financial services.
- Strategic **digitisation of payment systems for financial inclusion** requires the adaptation of technological solutions to specific needs and their alignment with capacity development. In this context, the use of the System for Identification and Registration of Beneficiaries (SCOPE) as a technology tool gave WFP experience with effective digital management of large-scale cash transfer programmes. It also represents a significant opportunity to consider how digitisation processes can be used to strengthen national social protection system capacities.
- Systems preparedness is key and supported by the development of routine social protection systems, processes, and capabilities for delivery of programmes, as well as the capacity to effectively handle crises of varying natures and scales. In developing social protection systems, it is important to address system fragmentation and possible coverage gaps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1: WFP should establish more **structured platforms for knowledge sharing and exchange** both **internally** among its country offices and regional bureau as well as **externally** among partners, while also providing support to strengthen capacities in less advanced regions. This can be achieved by creating regular internal opportunities to share material and learn from SRSP experiences; allocating resources for knowledge management and capturing lessons learned; and providing systematic opportunities for regional cross-learning, inter-regional support and technical assistance for the least developed countries that may lack the social protection system foundational building blocks.

R2: WFP should **continue positioning itself as a key partner to national governments** in regard to SRSP, as part to its broader contribution to social protection system strengthening for better food security and nutrition outcomes. This includes **taking a proactive role as a coordinator of key stakeholders, leading evidence generation and exchange events, as well as developing country-specific strategies for social protection systems strengthening.**

R3: WFP should continue **generating robust evidence** on its engagement in **strengthening social protection systems.** It should continue **enhancing the monitoring and evaluation capacities** of these systems by developing a social protection Theory of Change and performance monitoring framework. That framework should use SMART indicators for each outcome. It should also support national monitoring and evaluation systems to maximize both national governments and WFP's investments in strengthening social protection.

R4: Recognizing the significant investment to date, WFP should continue with internal (WFP personnel) and external (partners, national and sub-national governments) **capacity strengthening on SRSP** as part of the broader capacity strengthening efforts on social protection in LAC. This entails training partnerships with academic institutions, South-South cooperation, and conferences.

R5: WFP should continue to expand its **evidence generation and investments in disaster risk financing,** where it is relevant, to contribute to **sustainable financing models of response to shocks** through strengthened social protection. To achieve this, WFP should generate evidence about the usage and potential benefits of these mechanisms. It should map existing disaster risk financing mechanisms to identify possible gaps and areas where WFP or other partners can bring added value. WFP should also be advocating for a risk-layered approach in its work. This includes ensuring that the impacts on humans are prioritized by governments in their allocations before and after emergencies.

R6: WFP should continue exploring opportunities to **support governments in the region in digitalisation processes** to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of social protection delivery. Particular **emphasis should be placed on registries, monitoring, and payment and delivery systems.** WFP should prioritize tailored technical assistance, capacity strengthening, and advocacy for the adoption of digital solutions by governments, beneficiaries, and partners, including local merchants. Any assistance provided should also consider the inclusion of both women and men, as well as populations with limited connectivity.

R7: When assisting governments in strengthening social protection systems and emergency preparedness, WFP should ensure that it also contributes to **enhancing inclusion, gender-sensitivity and potentially their transformative attributes.** It should do this by taking a participatory approach to elaborating clear and actionable guidance for country offices on gender sensitive approaches to SRSP and by identifying a clear strategy for how to engage with the governments on gender, inclusion, and intersectionality.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the evaluation team, and do not necessarily reflect those of the World Food Programme (WFP). Responsibility for the opinions expressed in this report rests solely with the authors. Publication of this document does not imply endorsement by WFP of the opinions expressed.

The designation employed and the presentation of material in maps do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of WFP concerning the legal or constitutional status of any country, territory or sea area, or concerning the delimitation of frontiers.

SUMMARY EVALUATION REPORT

Flexible Systems-Effective Responses?

Regional Evaluation of WFP's contribution to Shock-Responsive Social Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean (2015-2022)

Decentralized Evaluation Report

WFP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean