



World Food Programme

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Executive summary

In 2023, the impacts of diverse regional and global crises have disproportionately affected those who are poor and food-insecure. Extreme events had devastating consequences for the lives and livelihoods of people who are already facing alarming levels of hunger, while further widening the gender- and education-related inequalities and aggravating social tensions. National governments were front and centre in driving activities to curb hunger and promote development, with social protection being seen as a key instrument.

Demand for the United Nations World Food Programme's (WFP) technical advice and guidance on social protection has been growing continuously. In 2023, WFP supported nationally led social protection systems and programmes in 98 countries across all regions where it operates, an increase of 10 countries compared with 2022. Among these, for the 20 countries for which data are available, this support contributed to increased coverage for over 834 million people through national social protection systems programmes which were indirectly supported by WFP. Many of these are in India, where for many years WFP has provided technical advice to the government's Targeted Public Distribution System, an in-kind social protection programme, to help optimise, digitalise and automate its supply chain. WFP also continued to play an important role in strengthening government capacities on school meals programmes, which, in many countries, are considered part of the social protection system. An estimated 107 million children in 77 countries received school meals from programmes implemented by governments or partners with technical support from WFP.

WFP's comparative advantage in social protection is its ability to leverage its deep field presence, practical operational expertise and firm understanding of poverty and vulnerability in a way that helps governments develop solutions that enable households to better meet their food security, nutrition and other essential needs and to manage risks and shocks. This happens especially in the most fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

- Strengthening national social protection programmes by making them more nutrition-sensitive to achieve **Zero Hunger**. In Uganda, WFP supported the introduction of the NutriCash component to the national Child-Sensitive Social Protection Programme, which is a cash-plus initiative targeted towards pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls and children under two in both host and refugee communities. In 2023, the programme distributed USD 2.2 million in cash transfers to 13,633 beneficiaries. In Pakistan, WFP implemented the Benazir Nashonuma Programme, focusing on stunting prevention during the first 1,000 days of life, which leverages the existing targeting system and registration process of the Benazir Income Support Programme, the government's flagship social protection programme. Currently, the programme operates in 158 districts and aims to support to 1.7 million women and children by 2024.
- Strengthening **adaptive social protection** and the development of national systems which better manage risks and shocks; with the integration of climate data monitoring tools in Cambodia to enhance the flood-response through social protection programmes. In Mozambique, as part of the anticipatory action plan that was activated in 2023, WFP provided

financial and technical assistance to support the horizontal expansion of the national social protection programme, providing anticipatory cash-based transfers to 11,800 vulnerable households in districts that activated anticipatory action plans.

- WFP has emerged as a key player in working on social protection **in fragile and conflict settings**, engaging on the sector in 80% of the countries on the World Bank's FCV 2023 list of countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence. In Ukraine, WFP's support to Ministry of Social Protection consists of pension top-ups for over 260,000 pensioners and complementary social assistance to over 310,000 people with disabilities. In the Sahel region, where recent coup d'états in Niger and Burkina Faso have increased regional volatility, WFP supports governments' shock responses through a twin track approach, whereby cash transfers are delivered through governments' programmes where possible, and, if national capacities are saturated, the delivery uses service providers while remaining aligned to governments' responses.
- WFP assists the **digitalisation** of elements of the national social protection systems, contributing to more efficient schemes. In Mauritania, WFP promoted the use of the national social registry for the lean season response while, as a result, supporting a continuous update of the data thanks to a complementary targeting to minimise exclusion and inclusion errors. In Rwanda, WFP supports the digitisation of the Complaints Feedbacks Mechanisms to ensure that programme participants can voice their concerns and provide feedback on social protection programmes, contributing to meaningful programme adjustment and tracking of formal complaints resolved.

WFP's work in the sector is strengthened thanks to its partnerships and collaborations with donors, other agencies and academic partners, and thanks to rich exchanges of knowledge and evidence with the global social protection community. In 2023, donor contributions to social protection amounted to an estimated USD 180 million. A number of corporate initiatives, such as: the organisation of a side event at the WFP Executive Board meeting in October or the launch of the USD 64 million WFP [Changing Lives Transformation Fund](#) to provide multi-year catalytic funding for country offices to working with government, also reveal the increasing importance of social protection as a key component of WFP work. With respect to social protection for Zero Hunger, WFP played a central role in supporting the working groups of the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030) and the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) Coalition on Social Protection and Food Systems Transformation. Similarly, WFP contributed its thought leadership to the use of social protection for managing risks and shocks in a wide range of regional and global engagements. WFP co-hosted four sessions at the [Global Forum on Adaptive Social Protection](#) in June, including on climate and disaster risk financing and the investment case for adaptive social protection.

Global challenges and social protection

In 2023, 783 million people experienced chronic hunger globally, with 333 million individuals currently facing acute levels of food insecurity¹. Critical levels of food insecurity, along with the looming threat of famine, are particularly prevalent in Burkina Faso, Mali, Palestine (Gaza Strip), Somalia, and South Sudan. The escalation of conflict in Gaza in October 2023 exacerbated pre-existing food insecurity and rendered the Gaza Strip the most severe food crisis in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) history, with all of its 2.2 million people facing high levels of acute food insecurity and almost 80% of the population internally displaced.²

On a global scale, it is projected that almost 600 million people will be chronically undernourished in 2030, pointing to the immense challenge of achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target to eradicate hunger. The nutritional condition of children under 5 and pregnant and breastfeeding women worsened in 2023 with 36.4 million children under 5 and 9.3 million pregnant and breastfeeding women facing acute malnutrition.³

The breadth and depth of these crises is exacerbated by socio-economic challenges: persistent poverty, aggravated by the impact of COVID-19, ongoing violent conflicts, and the challenges posed by climate change, continues to affect millions of people worldwide. In 2022, approximately 648 million individuals, equivalent to 8% of the global population, lived in extreme poverty, struggling to survive on less than USD 2.15 per day.⁴ Additionally, income inequality

has reached alarming levels, with the wealthiest 1% amassing over 38% of the world's wealth in the same year, while the bottom 50% held a mere 2%.⁵ Poverty, coupled with limited access to resources and opportunities, has heightened the vulnerability and susceptibility of individuals to shocks and stresses. This has resulted in increased levels of food insecurity, malnutrition, and displacement, thus creating and perpetuating a vicious cycle.

National social protection systems already make an enormous contribution towards fostering a resilient and sustainable recovery to these crises while addressing future shocks and vulnerabilities. Over 3.5 billion people worldwide have access to at least one statutory cash transfer programme, which has greatly reduced the incidence of poverty. Social protection programmes foster inclusive economic growth, support food and nutrition security, and accelerate progress towards Zero Hunger: on average, social protection programmes tend to increase a household's food expenditure by 13%. Governments are committed to expanding social protection coverage for people in situations of poverty and vulnerability as part of the SDGs, and many have made enormous progress.

When governments provide adequate social protection to their citizens (in crises and in stable times), humanitarian needs drop. By using its decades of experience to help strengthen national capacities, WFP delivers impact at scale—indirectly improving food security and nutrition outcomes for hundreds of millions of people.



WFP support to social protection at a glance

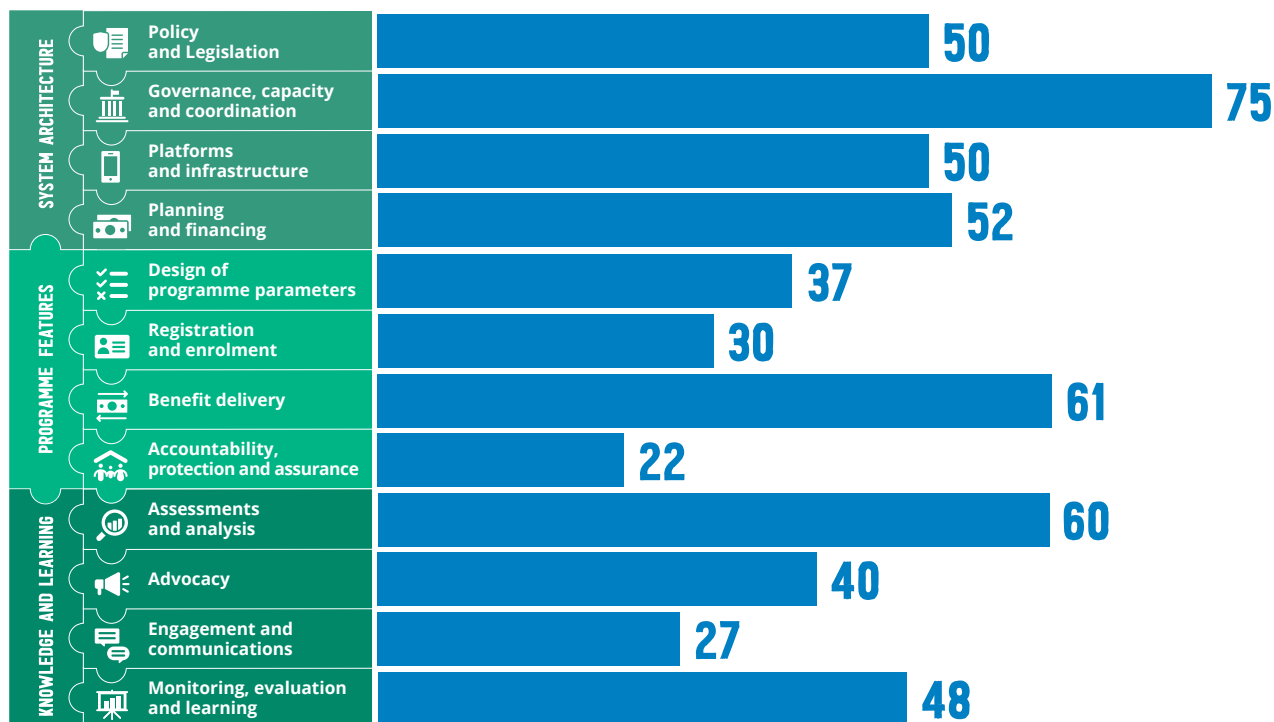
What is WFP doing, and why is it important?

In 2023, WFP supported 98 countries to strengthen their national social protection systems in view of contributing to people's food security, healthy diets and ability to meet essential needs and/or manage risks. This represents an increase of 10 countries and territories compared to 2022. Furthermore, 2023 marked a significant step forward for WFP reporting on its achievements in social protection. The current Corporate Results Framework (2022-25) is the first to offer country offices a dedicated indicator with which they can set a high-level target and record their support to national social protection systems. Since its launch, some 55 country offices have not only chosen to use the indicator and marker, but also

have reported successful achievement of their target in at least one year (see the WFP Annual Performance Report 2023).

As detailed in the [WFP's Strategy for Support to Social Protection](#), national social protection systems can be broadly categorized into three levels of intervention for WFP. The first level covers WFP support to the enabling environment that underpins the whole social protection system, such as support to policies and legislation, coordination mechanisms, and procedures for planning and financing. The second covers WFP support to the social protection programmes that deliver services and assistance to the population (such as cash transfer programmes or school feeding programmes). The third level includes

Figure 1: Number of countries where WFP contributed to each of the 12 building blocks, through technical advice to national actors and/or delivery on their behalf, 2023.



cross-cutting processes aimed at generating and sharing knowledge and learning. WFP provides technical expertise to varying combinations of these components of the system in each country where it works, depending on WFP's comparative advantage, added value, the needs of the government and the activities of other partners. Figure 1 illustrates, for each building block of a social protection system, the number of countries in which we engaged in that area.

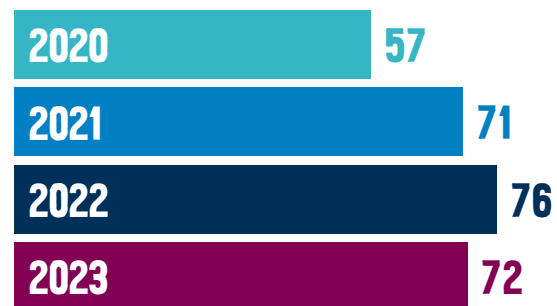
In almost every country where it operates, WFP continues to be a partner for governments seeking to strengthen the **enabling environment** of their social protection system, and increasingly so, with the number of countries where we have engaged in this system strengthening work rising from 77 in 2020 to 84 in 2023, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Number of countries supported by WFP at the social protection policy level



Nonetheless, WFP also demonstrates a strong and consistent focus on supporting government-owned **social protection programmes**: Building on its decades of expertise in delivering cash and in-kind transfers, including a history of supporting school meals programmes dating back to its foundation in the 1960s, WFP has long assisted governments with the design, delivery and assurance of a variety of their own social protection programmes. See number of countries with social protection programmes WFP supported over the last three years - Figure 3.

Figure 3: Number of countries with social protection programmes supported by WFP



Source: WFP country offices' annual country reports, 2023

In most cases, WFP works with governments at policy and programme levels, supporting social protection systems and programmes through both technical advice and implementation support as well as complementary actions in its own programming. These different modes of support may be blended or combined according to contextual needs. For example, in 2023 in Djibouti, WFP collaborated with UNDP to support the Ministry of Social Affairs and Solidarities (MASS) in the formulation of a new social protection strategy for 2024-2027. The year-long process involved multi-stakeholder consultations, primary and secondary data collection and analysis to ascertain the social assistance needs. At the same time, WFP also assists MASS to

implement the national safety net programme, Programme National de Solidarité Famille (PNSF) while working to extend the programme to refugee households, many of whom are not yet covered. WFP provided cash transfers to households identified through the national social registry, and this pilot is expected to shed light on the feasibility of integrating refugee households in the PNSF.⁶

In line with its two key strategic priorities of assisting people to meet their food security, nutrition and other essential needs, and increasing their capacity to manage risks and shocks, WFP continued to strengthen national systems to achieve food security and emergency



preparedness. These areas also reflect the priorities for governments to address some of the world's most pressing issues in 2023, in particular, in mitigating the impact of the global food crises and their key drivers, such as insecurity and conflicts. This confirms that WFP's engagement in the social protection sphere remains crucial and relevant, for its interventions continue to speak directly to the needs generated by conflicts and crises as they unfold in real time.

In addition to responding to ongoing situations, WFP is also supporting governments in their long-term resilience building efforts, which is essential given the sustained impacts of record-breaking global temperatures and extreme weather events

from 2023 as well as potential prolonging or escalation of conflicts in the horizon.⁷

Who is WFP reaching? WFP's technical support contributed to increased coverage for over 834 million people⁸ through national social protection systems programmes which were indirectly supported by WFP. In terms of coverage, the bulk of those indirect beneficiaries for whom we have data was reached through its support to India's extensive national food-based social protection systems. Box 1 below gives more insight into India's flagship social protection programme's role in addressing food insecurity.



India - The Targeted Public Distribution System – a food security social protection programme reaching over 800 million of the most vulnerable.

The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), India's flagship food-based social protection programme, has had a major role in addressing food insecurity, under-nutrition, and poverty. Beyond addressing immediate foodgrain needs, TPDS improves nutrition by providing fortified rice and millets to targeted nutritionally vulnerable family members– such as, pregnant and breastfeeding women and children. Moreover, households benefit from reduced expenditures on food as they receive in-kind food from TPDS, freeing up more consumption towards other essential expenses like education and healthcare that help build their human capital. By ensuring a consistent supply of rice and wheat to beneficiaries, TPDS contributes to stabilizing prices in the market,

thereby enhancing accessibility for low-income families. Consequently, TPDS contributes to poverty reduction and serves as a mechanism for reducing inequality by ensuring a consistent access to food to those vulnerable to food insecurity.

WFP support to the Government of India aims at ensuring that targeted beneficiaries under TPDS were reached in a more effective and efficient manner. It includes supply chain optimisation, digitisation and automation, pilot of innovative solutions and capacity strengthening of both individuals and systems. In 2023, WFP supported the scale-up of fortified rice in all the Government's food-based social protection programmes, including TPDS.



Furthermore, in line with the WFP Social Protection Strategy that promotes the inclusion of people with diverse and often intersecting vulnerabilities and inequalities, WFP provided support to programmes and systems tailored to the unique needs and risks faced by different populations – for example, those vulnerable to or affected by crises and conflicts and those experiencing adverse outcomes due to specific social identity markers (e.g., gender, age, disability, internal displacement, etc.). For example, to meet the needs of school-aged children, WFP continued to play an important role in implementing and strengthening government capacities on school feeding programmes, which, in multiple countries, are considered part of the social protection system. An estimated 107 million children in 77 countries received school meals from programmes implemented by governments or partners with technical support from WFP. In parallel, WFP worked with governments to reach over 21 million schoolchildren directly across 61 countries with nutritious school meals, snacks or cash-based transfers, while providing technical assistance to national programmes in 20 additional countries. In Benin, for example,

WFP supported a massive scale up of the National Integrated School Feeding Programme, delivering hot meals to over 1.3 million children on behalf of and funded by the Government.⁹

Where does WFP work? Geographically, WFP’s support to social protection cuts across all the regions it works in. Yet, in terms of WFP’s measurable expenditures on activities contributing to the social protection sector, a significant amount was concentrated in the Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe region. In Ukraine, for example, the Ministry of Social Policy, the Pension Fund of Ukraine and WFP launched a complementary social benefit cash programme to address the needs of those most vulnerable to the ongoing conflict, whereas in Iraq, WFP extended beyond responding to immediate needs to also building the population’s resilience to climate shocks and strengthening the Government’s Public Distribution System.¹⁰ In Lebanon, WFP worked with the World Bank to conduct a due diligence exercise to integrate two major programmes – the National Poverty Targeting Programme and the Emergency Social Safety Net – into one unified programme.¹¹



Social protection for Zero Hunger

When tailored to food security and nutrition objectives and integrated with other sectors, social protection programs can contribute to address food insecurity as well as the complex determinants of malnutrition. These programs enhance household food consumption, dietary quality, access to essential services, and the adoption of optimal care and feeding practices, thereby addressing underlying factors contributing to hunger and malnutrition.

As the need for food security varies across the life cycle, WFP's support for social protection strives to be nutrition-sensitive, enhancing integration with key nutrition services, such as those for children and mothers with distinct nutritional requirements, and the provision of fortified foods or micronutrient supplements, along with institutionalizing assistance programs during lean seasons. Among many examples, two countries where WFP has been engaged in this support for several years and expanded its assistance during 2023 are Uganda and Pakistan.

School meals as a means to address food systems challenges

School meals programmes are among the most widespread safety nets, covering 418 million children worldwide¹² and they are a prime example of how such social protection programmes can tackle food systems challenges. According to the White Paper on School Meals and Food Systems, these programmes can be designed to promote healthier diets, shorter

and more sustainable value chains, and more resilient food systems. Additionally, school food procurement policies can encourage more sustainable farming practices. Linking smallholder farmers to school meals programmes can boost local agricultural and economic development, increase community resilience, and shorten supply chains.¹³



WFP is already implementing these approaches in its school meals support. In 2023, WFP assisted governments in 59 countries on home-grown school feeding (HGSF), strengthening links between smallholder farmers and schools and providing clean cooking solutions in schools across 16 countries. For instance, in Nepal, WFP

continues to provide technical assistance to the government, supporting the HGSF model, establishing supply chain linkages between farmer groups and schools. The model benefited over 190,000 schoolchildren in nearly 2,000 schools, with over 1,000 producers or smallholder farmers supplying to schools in 2023.

Uganda – Child-sensitive social protection programme

In Uganda, food insecurity remains a significant challenge, with half the population moderately food insecure and 13% experiencing severe food insecurity, out of a total population of 45.7 million¹⁴. Malnutrition is also widespread: 25% of children under five are stunted and 31% undernourished, jeopardizing their mental and physical development. The Government has led various social protection initiatives to address poverty and vulnerability. WFP supports these efforts by helping vulnerable populations meet their basic needs and strengthening the social protection systems to address hunger and climate-related changes.

Since 2019, WFP and UNICEF have been collaborating with the Government of Uganda to implement the Child-Sensitive Social Protection Programme. This programme introduced 'NutriCash' as a sub-component to strengthen both the social protection and health systems. NutriCash, a cash-plus initiative targeted towards pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls and children under two in both host and refugee communities in the eight districts of the West-Nile region. NutriCash aims to improve nutrition and health outcomes for these groups. In 2023, the programme distributed USD 2.2 million in cash transfers to 13,633 PBWGs and children under two¹⁵.

The programme adopts an integrated approach: UNICEF oversees the health systems by providing maternal and antenatal care and immunizations while WFP manages the nutrition and social protection cash component. Beneficiaries receive cash and along with that, training in how to achieve social and behaviour change through different communication (SBCC) materials, backyard gardening, and financial literacy. SBCC promotes proper maternal and infant feeding practices and encourages them to use the existing health services. Backyard gardening boosts dietary diversity and entrepreneurial skills. Monitoring reports show that 70 percent of NutriCash recipients use their gardens to diversify diets, and 74% achieve an acceptable food consumption score.

In 2023, WFP sustained its partnership with the Government of Uganda, supporting SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Discussions with the Office of the Prime Minister and the World Bank aim to expand NutriCash under the fourth Northern Uganda Social Action Fund and the Second Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project. WFP plans to extend NutriCash to 3,500 beneficiaries in Karamoja and in the Southwest through the Self-Reliance Model and seeks new partnerships with other UN agencies.



Pakistan - better nutritional and health outcomes through social protection

In Pakistan, chronic malnutrition, particularly among women and children in situations of vulnerability, remains a pressing concern requiring sustained and holistic efforts. To support the government's initiatives, WFP implements the Benazir Nashonuma Programme (BNP), focusing on stunting prevention during the first 1,000 days of life – from conception to two years of age. This programme leverages the existing targeting system and registration process of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), the government's flagship social protection programme. Through BNP, children aged 6-23 months and pregnant and breastfeeding women from the poorest households enrolled in the BISP receive a range of services and counselling at facilitation centres within district-level health centres. The support provided includes a combination of conditional cash transfers, antenatal and postnatal care services, health

and hygiene awareness sessions, and a three-month supply of specialized nutritious foods.

WFP, on behalf of the government, provides overall technical oversight and programme management, collaborating closely with BISP and government health departments at both the district and provincial levels. This partnership between WFP and the Government began in August 2020 with the launch of BNP in the Khyber District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. In the first phase, facilitation centers were opened in 15 districts. In December 2021, WFP and the Government of Pakistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding to expand the BNP to all 171 districts over the next three years, making it the largest WFP-supported nutrition programme in a single country. Currently, the programme operates in 158 districts and aims to support to 1.7 million women and children by June 2024¹⁶.



Adaptive social protection to manage risks and shocks

Shocks jeopardise people's ability to meet their essential needs, and, in turn, people's vulnerability to shocks is heightened if their ability to meet their essential needs is already compromised. Climate change, in conjunction with other socioeconomic trends, features strongly among these. Through its support to social protection, WFP has been a key partner of governments to respond to different shocks and crises, while protecting the food security and nutrition of people in situations of vulnerability.

WFP has supported by building synergies between climate data analysis and monitoring tools, social protection system preparedness and response and links with anticipatory action. Examples of long-term support in this area that continued in 2023 have been in Cambodia and Mozambique, among many. WFP's continuous work on social protection system strengthening in the Latin America and Caribbean region has also been captured through the shock-responsive social protection evaluation.

Latin America and the Caribbean - Does flexible systems equal effective responses? WFP's contribution to Shock-Responsive Social Protection.

In 2023 the Regional Bureau for Latin American and the Caribbean published a **formative regional evaluation**¹⁷ examining WFP's work in shock-responsive social protection. The evaluation focused on technical assistance and advocacy for enhancing national social protection systems' responsiveness to shocks. Key recommendations stressed the value of WFP's field presence and long-term investment, which requires more time compared to humanitarian programming. For example, in the Dominican Republic, as an emergency preparedness action, WFP identified and prepared response scenarios for events of different impact magnitudes to ensure readiness. In this sense, when Hurricane Fiona impacted the country in mid-September 2022, WFP had already put in place processes to rapidly distribute assistance and support local and national authorities in their response.

WFP supported the national response plan in three domains: technical and logistical support to local and national authorities to assess damages and needs, estimate the food insecure population, register affected populations in the social protection database, and implement the emergency voucher of the social protection programme 'Supérate'. The emergency voucher was used by 35,000 households.

The evaluation also highlighted the importance of closely engaging with national governments to foster ownership and enhance the uptake of new solutions, as well as collaborating with sub-regional institutions to strengthen capacity. WFP's support for coordination efforts and the institutionalisation of coordination platforms was also found crucial for improving national social protection systems' responsiveness to shocks.

Cambodia - Strengthening the social protection system for shock response

Cambodia is ranked the eighth most vulnerable country to disasters. Climatic shocks, particularly floods and droughts, are frequent, affecting an average of 95,000 households annually over the past decade¹⁸.

Before 2020, Cambodia's social assistance comprised small, discrete programmes implemented by different ministries, with limited impact on macro poverty and vulnerability. In response, since 2020, WFP has provided technical support to the General Secretariat for the National Social Protection Council in developing a national framework for shock-responsive social protection. Institutionalised in 2022, this framework now serves as a foundation for further engagement with key stakeholders, notably, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth and the National Committee for Disaster Management.

Concurrently, WFP has developed PRISM, a web-based climate risk monitoring system, now operational in Cambodia. PRISM integrates geospatial data on natural hazards with socioeconomic vulnerability information¹⁹, linking various data streams such as field assessments, early warning systems, and satellite-based remote sensing with the national

registry of vulnerable households (IDPoor), and other datasets to measure risk and impact.

PRISM played a crucial role in social protection programme response to shocks. In 2020 and 2021, PRISM informed WFP's flood response, providing complementary top-up to the national "Cash Transfer for Poor and Vulnerable Households" programme, reaching 38,985 households²⁰. The WFP programme was designed to align with the national cash transfer programme, utilizing data from the government's IDPoor database. PRISM's satellite-derived geographical data on flooding helped WFP to localize assistance to flood-affected areas.

PRISM has also been central to WFP's goal of connecting disaster risk management and social protection with an anticipatory action approach, contributing to the operationalisation of the national shock-responsive social protection framework.

In 2023, this integration of hazard risk with demographic data has been used by the government and WFP to design a new national cash-based shock-responsive programme targeting flood-prone households.





Mozambique - Anticipating extreme weather with social protection

Since 2019, WFP has been working with the Government of Mozambique to develop a comprehensive early warning and anticipatory action framework. WFP held extensive consultations with the Government to inform the project design and tailor specific technical support for the relevant actors, namely the National Disaster Risk Management Institute (INGD), the National Meteorological Institute (INAM) and the Institute of Social Action (INAS). WFP works in close collaboration with these government institutions to integrate early warning and anticipatory action into the government-led disaster risk management cycle.

In parallel, WFP is supporting coordination efforts for fostering the integration of Anticipatory Actions between Social Protection and Emergency Preparedness and Response stakeholders. This is done through the multistakeholder national Adaptive Social Protection Working Group, where WFP has a key role in facilitating Secretariat meetings, whereby the national institutions are working jointly to deepen the integration between

anticipatory actions, disaster response and shock responsive social protection.

Through the working group, WFP supports enhanced coordination between disaster management (INGD) and social protection actors - Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Action (MGCAS) and the INAS. In August 2023, drought forecast triggers were hit and for the first time, drought anticipatory action was activated in Mozambique with the objective to mitigate the negative impact of the forecasted drought linked to the El Niño phenomenon that marked the 2023/2024 rainy season. One of the activated anticipatory actions was the horizontal expansion of the national social protection programme, providing anticipatory cash-based transfers (CBT) to 11,800 vulnerable households in districts that activated anticipatory action plans. WFP played an instrumental role in providing financial and technical support for the implementation of anticipatory actions, including the facilitation of coordination between INAS and ING D.

Social protection in contexts of fragility

WFP has emerged as a key player in working on social protection in fragile and conflict settings, engaging on the sector in 80% of the countries on the World Bank's FCV 2023 list of countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence. Where

appropriate, WFP country offices in protracted conflicts are actively looking to contribute to sustaining and building long term national social protection systems and programmes. Two such examples are in Ukraine and the Sahel.

Ukraine – Conflict response through national systems

In Ukraine, mature social protection systems were crucial at the onset of the war with Russia, enabling WFP to rapidly assist over 6 million crisis-affected Ukrainians through early coordination and data sharing agreements with the Ministry of Social Protection (MoSP). WFP's ongoing support to MoSP has been vital in maintaining and adapting programs to respond to the crisis. In partnership with MoSP, WFP supports pension top-ups for over 260,000 pensioners and complementary social assistance to over 310,000 people with disabilities, demonstrating a commitment to sustaining and strengthening Ukraine's social protection systems. WFP also contributes to

school feeding, ensuring nearly 50,000 children receive daily hot meals during the academic year²¹. Besides channelling cash through national systems, WFP provided technical and financial support to enhance the Unified Information System of the Social Sphere, improving digital systems for displaced populations²². The collaboration between humanitarian and social protection actors have been effective, largely due to the Ukraine's strong social protection system. WFP's early work in linking humanitarian action to social protection has now been formalized in the Perehkid initiative²³ led by the government and supported by WFP.



The Sahel – Shock-responsive social protection in fragile and conflict settings

In the Sahel, WFP adopted a comprehensive approach to social protection in fragile settings, including in conflict-affected countries, enhancing shock-responsiveness, addressing chronic vulnerabilities, and ensuring effective delivery in complex environments. This strategy is part of a collaborative effort with UNICEF under the Joint Programme “Responding to COVID-19 through Social Protection Systems in the Sahel: Towards addressing the socioeconomic impacts of multiple shocks” funded by the German development cooperation (BMZ-KFW). The 18-month Joint Programme began in 2020 with a combined objective of tackling COVID-19 and providing shock-responsive social protection support. Since then, the Joint Programme evolved into multi-year cash delivery and systems strengthening interventions in Mali, Mauritania and Niger, and since December 2023, extended to Burkina Faso and Chad.

The delivery of the Joint Programme followed a twin-track approach: as far as possible, donor-funded cash transfers are delivered through government programmes and delivery systems (Track 1 or ‘government track’). For instance, national safety net programmes in Mali (Jigisemejiri), Mauritania (Tekavoul and El Maouna) and Niger (Wadata Talaka) facilitated the Track 1 response, as delivery mechanisms for selection, enrolment, payment, or grievances could be leveraged. However, under the twin track approach, where government capacities are saturated or systems become disrupted, or where government have no access, delivery is carried out instead directly via UN channels or those of its partners and service providers, all while remaining aligned to government responses and priorities (Track 2 or ‘aligned track’). Overall, the shock responses leveraged on pre-established tools for the programme implementation: in all three countries, the Cadre Harmonisé, a

widely accepted methodology for classification and prioritization of vulnerability, facilitated geographical prioritization for expansions under the programme, across Tracks 1 and 2. For instance, in Mali, the Joint Programme supported the government’s programme for emergency cash transfers, known as the PGTMU and Jigisemejiri, a national cash transfer programme, to expand caseloads. In Niger, the Joint Programme supported a one-off payment to assist vulnerable households to cope with the COVID-19 shock, aligning to Wadata Talaka safety net parameters.

Following the July 2023 coup in Niger, international sanctions and funding cuts disrupted social protection cash payments from the government. However, the Joint Programme shifted all its cash transfer support to Track 2 (direct delivery), ensuring continued delivery of drought response cash transfers to vulnerable families despite the suspension of national programmes. The twin-track approach underscores the importance of having a dynamic delivery system to ensure that social assistance continues to reach the most vulnerable families, even during times of political instability and disruptions to national social protection systems. It underlines the importance of building resilient social protection systems capable of addressing both chronic and acute vulnerabilities, contributing to long-term stability and development. Germany remains a key donor for this initiative and has announced further funding increases. WFP aims to capitalize on lessons from this model²⁴ and diversify the partnership and donor pool²⁵.

Digital social protection

Even though social protection plays a pivotal role in achieving Zero Hunger, significant challenges remain in ensuring cost-efficient, effective and equitable access to meet the needs of people in situations of vulnerability at scale. Technology-driven and innovative approaches can be applied to different steps in the social protection programme cycle with, for example, assessing eligibility criteria, enrolling beneficiaries, delivering benefits, and monitoring.

WFP is actively providing technical advisory support to governments and strengthening their implementation capacities in areas such as social registries, data protection, and community feedback mechanisms for social protection, including where it is providing emergency cash transfer through national systems. The creation of linkages to digital risk monitoring systems, such as PRISM as mentioned above, is another such example. WFP has also conducted research and scoping assessments to better understand regional and local factors that affect the strengthening of

Management Information System (MIS), data and registries as well as to examine the barriers and opportunities to improve digital financial inclusion through humanitarian and social protection cash transfers.

In 2023, two research studies on MIS were completed. The first study assessed the state of social protection information systems in the Asia Pacific region, including an overview of systems in the Kyrgyz Republic, Cambodia and Lao PDR. It reviewed strategic and technical support for national social protection information systems, highlighting WFP's advisory role and addressing key questions about modalities, enabling factors, WFP's added value, and implications for programming and data management. The second study analysed 19 West and Central African countries²⁶ documenting trends and strategic implications in developing social registries and digital information systems, which are crucial for targeting and supporting vulnerable populations affected by poverty, climate change, and various risks.

Mauritania – Leveraging the social registry

As part of the twin track approach adopted for the previously introduced Joint Programme in the Sahel, WFP and partners in some countries leveraged adequately populated social registries to facilitate the use of a common tool and methodology to select recipient households for both tracks.

In Mauritania, the social registry is fully run by the government. Partners were already familiar with the tool and ready to use it prior to the start of the Joint Programme. WFP and partners thus capitalized on the social registry for programme implementation and this led to a temporary increase in the Tekavoul safety net transfer value for households with children below age five, as well as for the El Maouna programme to provide a lean season response.

At the same time, WFP provides regular feedback to the Social Registry vis-à-vis the overall functioning of the system. As a result, it ensures a continuous update of the data thanks to a complementary targeting to minimize exclusion and inclusion errors. The use of the system as well as critical feedback provided by WFP has allowed the Social Registry to function well and become more legitimate in the eyes of government and other strategic partners, which has led to the support of several actors including the government to adopt it in the targeting of their programmes. Moreover, WFP piloted the use of the government's distribution monitoring platform, managed by the Social Registry, at the request of the Government to test and provide operational feedback on how to improve the overall system and to enable the Government to have immediate visibility of the population assisted through the Social Registry database.

Rwanda – Digitalisation of Complaints and Feedback Mechanism

WFP supports the digitalisation of the Complaints and Feedback Mechanism (CFMs) in Rwanda, that is a key entry point for improving the agility and ability of the social protection system to adapt to changing household circumstances and vulnerabilities. A functional CFM system enables programme participants and their communities to voice their concerns and provide feedback on social protection programmes, contributing to meaningful programme adjustment and tracking of formal complaints resolved.

Thus, as part of its digital transformation agenda, the Government of Rwanda also aims to streamline all government related channels for community feedback into a single Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This unified system will incorporate a wide range of community feedback mechanisms, including the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency's (LODA) management information system, and Ministry of Local Government's e-citizen. This effort aligns with the government's overarching vision for comprehensive digital transformation in managing community feedback²⁷

Since 2022, WFP provided technical assistance to LODA to enhance complaints and grievance management in social protection. This included firstly conducting a technical diagnostic assessment and enhancing key operational documents. Then, in 2023, WFP supported LODA to operationalise its CFM system through the secondment of a dedicated consultant to LODA to lead the development of the CFM system. To ensure that the system aligned with WFP best practices at local and international levels, WFP Rwanda Country Office consulted extensively with experts from various functional units (Research, Assessment, and Monitoring, Gender, and Accountability to Affected Populations). These principles were further contextualised to meet the needs and capacities of LODA specifically, considering the existing government guidance on complaints management and safeguarding. LODA also assigned focal points to accompany the consultant and facilitate knowledge transfer through training and on-the-job coaching. Additionally, a session was organised to facilitate knowledge-sharing between WFP Rwanda Country Office staff and all staff seconded to the government, ensuring alignment with WFP values and mission as they provided technical assistance to the government.



Global engagements: building partnerships and evidence-generation

Strengthening WFP's social protection partnerships globally is crucial for achieving WFP's objectives. In 2023, the Social Protection Unit continued to collaborate with donors, academic institutions, and other UN entities. The increasing importance of social protection as a key component of WFP's work was recognized through several major initiatives. These include the organization of a side event at the WFP Executive Board meeting in October 2023, the launch of the USD 64 million WFP Changing Lives Transformation Fund to provide multi-year catalytic funding for country offices working with governments to enhance impact—five of the ten successful applicants are focusing on social protection—and a joint commitment by WFP Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau and World Bank Managing Director of Operations Anna Bjerde to deepen their partnership and scale up efforts to expand adaptive social protection programmes. In September 2023, WFP hosted a “Dialogue on Social Protection” in Copenhagen, bringing together advisors from nine bilateral government organizations, private foundations, and academia, along with WFP staff from headquarters and regional bureaux. Additionally, WFP's Deputy Executive Director co-moderated a session on the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions at the UN SDG Summit, which served as a critical midpoint review of progress towards achieving the SDG goals.

In 2023, donor contributions to social protection reached an estimated USD 179 million with the largest contributions coming from Germany (USD 26.7 million), the European Union (USD 26.4 million), and the United Kingdom (USD 15.6 million). These funds enabled WFP to sustain its support for strengthening social protection in country offices, including in Ukraine, Burundi, and

Somalia. Additionally, the HQ Social Protection Trust Fund received a EUR 2 million contribution from France, aimed at supporting innovative projects that test digital solutions to improve social protection systems in Haiti and Rwanda, as well as developing proof-of-concept models that link disaster risk financing to shock-responsive social protection systems across the Asia-Pacific region.

With respect to **social protection for Zero Hunger**, WFP played a central role in supporting the working groups of the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030) and the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) Coalition on Social Protection and Food Systems Transformation. In 2023, the working group and Coalition launched a series of [blog posts](#) and [webinars](#) highlighting the essential links between social protection and food systems. In July, members participated in the [UNFSS+2 Stocktaking Moment](#), helping to organize a side event titled “[Food Systems Transformation amid Polycrises: Addressing Climate, Food Insecurity, Malnutrition, and Conflicts](#),” in collaboration with other coalitions. In October, members participated in the [51st Plenary Session of the Committee on World Food Security](#), which offered a platform for constructive dialogue with government representatives. Key sessions supported by WFP include one on “[Nourishing Connections](#),” and one on “[Nourishing Progress](#)”.

Similarly, WFP provided thought leadership on the use of social protection for **managing risks and shocks** across a wide range of regional and global engagements. WFP co-hosted four sessions at the [Global Forum on Adaptive Social Protection](#) in June, including on climate and disaster risk financing and the investment

case for adaptive social protection. At the [Asia-Pacific Social Protection Week](#), WFP participated in sessions including on social protection in a post-pandemic world, and on adaptive and shock-responsive social protection. As part of the USP2030 working group on social protection and climate change, WFP co-authored a [joint statement and call to action](#) urging that more international climate finance be directed towards social protection to accelerate climate goals. The statement was released at COP28 and heralds a step up in global attention to the links between climate financing and social protection, in which WFP is a thought leader.

During the year, WFP expanded its engagement on social protection to address conflict, fragility and forced displacement. This was showcased by its active engagement in an interagency working group on [linkages between humanitarian assistance and social protection](#), including co-facilitation of a 'Somalia Day'; the inclusion of commitments to support social protection in WFP's institutional plan to support the United Nations Secretary General's Action Agenda on internal displacement; and corporate and country pledges towards the multi-stakeholder Economic Inclusion and Social Protection 'mega pledge' at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. WFP continues to demonstrate thought leadership and generate new knowledge in its priority areas in relation to social protection, and document lessons from recent or ongoing technical assistance for the benefit of the global community.

In 2023, the value of our expertise was recognised through the establishment of four donor-funded global research pieces that enable WFP researchers to explore key questions on WFP's corporate agenda. First, a partnership with the US Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance in 2023 is enabling WFP to strengthen the targeting engineering of social protection programmes. This is done by improving the accuracy and precision of its vulnerability assessments to rightly identify the extreme poor and chronically food insecure,

while setting up strong community feedback mechanisms and appeals systems to reduce exclusion of the most marginalized segments of society. Second, with funding from BMZ and ECHO, WFP began a three-country study on the value of using social protection systems in the response to floods, drought and typhoons. Third, thanks to support from France, WFP is assessing how to reduce the unit cost of registering people onto Haiti's social registry, and how to use artificial intelligence to improve data management for social protection in Rwanda. Fourth, a knowledge partnership with CGIAR (a consortium of international organizations engaged in research on food security) and funded by NORAD began assessments and evaluations of national social protection programmes in Kenya and Somalia. Outputs from all research are expected in 2024.

Furthermore, WFP continued to draw on partnerships with several academic partners to produce knowledge products, including country-specific and thematic social protection studies, on priority topics including the linkages with anticipatory action, climate financing, and food security and nutrition. Another important milestone was the publication of the [summary of evaluation evidence on social protection](#) in September 2023. Reports are available on the [WFP's website](#).

Another important milestone was the publication of the [summary of evaluation evidence on social protection](#) in September 2023. The report identified three main comparative advantages of WFP in social protection: its ability to generate and use evidence, its expertise in food security and nutrition, and its ability to engage at all levels of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. It is recommended that WFP review and identify the most appropriate forms of partnerships for the future, ensure that programme design and implementation are based on analysis, adopt a nexus-centred approach to social protection work, and test the underlying assumptions in the social protection strategy.

Endnotes

- 1 This is a staggering rise of 200 million people compared to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. [A global food crisis. 2023: Another year of extreme jeopardy for those struggling to feed their families](#), World Food Program, 2023.
- 2 2024 Global Report on Food Crises, FSIN and [Global Network Against Food Crises](#), 2024.
- 3 2024 Global Report on Food Crises, FSIN and [Global Network Against Food Crises](#), 2024. There is limited comparability in number of children with acute malnutrition between countries due to calculation methods and other factors. The figure 36.4 million children under 5 is across 32 food-crisis countries where data is available, whereas the figure for 9.3 million pregnant and breast-feeding women is across 22 countries where data is available.
- 4 [Half of the global population lives on less than US\\$6.85 per person per day](#). Schoch, M. et. al, December 8, 2022, World Bank Blogs, World Bank.
- 5 [World Inequality Report 2022](#), World Inequality Lab, UNDP, 2022.
- 6 WFP (2023) [Djibouti Annual Country Report 2023](#).
- 7 2024 Global Report on Food Crises, FSIN and [Global Network Against Food Crises](#), 2024.
- 8 This number results from 20 COs that are reporting on outcome indicator n.44, which is calculated based on available governments' data https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000157354#:~:text=WFP%20assisted%2019.9%20million%20people,percent%20achievement%20of%20the%20target.
- 9 WFP (2023) [Benin Annual Country Report 2023](#).
- 10 WFP (2023) [Ukraine Annual Country Report 2023](#); WFP (2023) [Iraq Annual Country Report 2023](#).
- 11 WFP (2023) [Lebanon Annual Country Report 2023](#).
- 12 WFP (2022) [State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022](#). Rome, World Food Programme.
- 13 Pastorino, Silvia; Springmann, Marco; Backlund, Ulrika; Kaljonen, Minna; Singh, Samrat; Hunter, Danny; Vargas, Melissa; Milani, Peiman; Bellanca, Raffaella; Eustachio Colombo, Patricia; Makowicz Bastos, Deborah; Manjella, Aurillia; Wasilwa, Lusike; Wasike, Victor; Bundy, Donald AP; the Research Consortium White Paper writing team; (2023) [School meals and food systems: Rethinking the consequences for climate, environment, biodiversity, and food sovereignty](#). Discussion Paper. London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17037/PUBS.04671492>
- 14 Atamanov, A. (2022) Uganda, World Bank Poverty & Equity Briefs, October. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/publication/poverty-and-equity-briefs>
- 15 WFP (2023) [Uganda Annual Country Report 2023](#).
- 16 WFP (2023) [Pakistan Annual Country Report 2023](#).
- 17 Accessible at: docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000155989/download/
- 18 Smith, G. 2023. Scoping Study on Enhancing Food Security and Nutrition and Managing Risks and Shocks in Asia and the Pacific Through Support to Social Protection Systems: Cambodia. Centre for International Development and Training, Wolverhampton, and World Food Programme, Bangkok and Cambodia.
- 19 PRISM is a digital public good that brings together national disaster management organisations, national hydro-meteorological services, and government departments to collectively monitor risks, prioritise responses and inform programmes and policies. Increasingly, WFP has focused on deploying PRISM to inform governments with climate hazard information, such as measurements of rainfall levels and temperatures, along with vulnerability data to support risk-based decision-making.
- 20 Shafee, M., Zapata, L. (2023) [Leveraging Climate risk data tools to inform social protection: The Case of WFP's Platform for Real-time impact and Situation Monitoring \(PRISM\)](#).
- 21 See [Ukraine 2023 Country Report](#)
- 22 See an analysis of this on "[The state of the social protection system in Ukraine as it reaches the one-year mark of the conflict](#)"
- 23 The Perekhid Initiative seeks to transition humanitarian assistance to social protection. See [SITREP 38 on its first meeting in 2023](#).
- 24 See some of those lessons summarised here: [All the right tracks. Delivering shock responsive social protection: lessons from the COVID-19 response](#)
- 25 See for example a dedicated event that was held at the [BMZ Adaptive Social Protection Forum in 2023](#).
- 26 Namely, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Togo. See WFP (2023) [The challenge of coordination and inclusion: use of social registries and broader social protection information systems for capturing multiple vulnerabilities in West Africa – Regional Synthesis Report 2023](#) | World Food Programme (wfp.org)
- 27 WFP (2023) [Strengthening Rwanda's Community Feedback Mechanisms for Social Protection](#)

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