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WFP's support to social protection in Asia and the Pacific: Regional Implementation Plan

October 2024

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction.....	5
Situational analysis	7
WFP’s support for social protection in Asia and the Pacific.....	13
Implementation arrangements for WFP in the region	19
References	25
Photo Credits.....	26

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1

Introduction

Social protection¹ is a policy tool for preventing and protecting people from falling into poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion, and supporting individuals and households to manage and strengthen their resilience to shocks and stressors. Evidence shows that social protection can contribute to ensure food security, improve nutritional outcomes, build human capital, resilience, and economic growth.

WFP is one of the world's leading agencies working with governments and partners to improve the coverage, comprehensiveness, adequacy, quality and responsiveness of social protection systems, supporting 88 countries worldwide.² As outlined in WFP's global social protection strategy, WFP provides strategic and technical assistance to enable governments to effectively meet people's food security and nutritional needs and to better manage risks and shocks through strengthened social protection systems.

In Asia and the Pacific, WFP provides support across policy and programme design to improve access to and delivery of social protection in 16 countries,³ with a portfolio spanning food security and nutrition, resilience-building, climate and disaster risk financing, digital innovation and adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, amongst other activities.

To expand its support to national social protection systems in the region, WFP developed the Social Protection Implementation Plan for the Asia and the Pacific region to define a vision for its work in the region and a road map for the period 2024 - 2028. The plan was developed by WFP Regional Bureau Bangkok in partnership with Oxford Policy Management, following consultations with WFP staff and external stakeholders at the global, regional and country levels, and an extensive review of secondary literature. This brief summarises the plan's key recommendations and prioritised actions.

The document is structured as follows: following this introduction, Section 2 provides an overview of the regional context, highlighting key progresses and persistent challenges in poverty reduction, human development, and food security and nutrition, alongside a brief analysis of the regional social protection landscape. Section 3 describes WFP's role in support to national social protection in the region, focusing on its two regional priorities. Finally, Section 4 outlines the key actions WFP will undertake to achieve its priorities across five strategic workstreams: workforce development; partnerships and funding; knowledge management and learning; cross-functional support and coherence; and planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

1 A common interagency definition describes social protection as the "policies and programmes aimed at preventing, and protecting people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life [...with] a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups (ISPA, 2016; SPIAC-B, 2019). Social protection strategies include: social assistance (non-contributory support to vulnerable individuals), social insurance (contributory protection against social and economic risks), and labour market policies (support for employment and worker protection).

2 WFP (2023). [WFP and Social Protection Annual Review 2022](#)

3 In Asia and the Pacific, WFP supports national social protection systems through 16 country offices and one multi-country office in four sub-regions: Central Asia (Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan), Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste), South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), and one multi-country office covering 14 Pacific countries and territories.



2

Situational analysis

2.1 Regional context

The Asia Pacific region has made significant progress in reducing poverty, lifting 1.5 billion people out of extreme poverty within just two generations.⁴ The region has also witnessed a 19 percentage point increase in the human development index since the mid-1990s – the highest globally.⁵ Additionally, over the last 60 years, there have been notable advancements in health and education: child mortality rates have fallen, life expectancy has markedly increased, educational levels have risen, and the delivery of basic services has been enhanced.⁶

However, there are millions of people still trapped in poverty, and inequality remains deeply entrenched. As of 2019, around 185 million people remained extremely poor in absolute terms, earning less than USD 2.15 per day.⁷ The situation has been exacerbated by COVID-19, which is estimated to have pushed an additional 85 million people into extreme poverty.⁸ In addition, Asia is characterised by high income inequality, with an average Gini coefficient of 44.7.^{9,10} The highest level of inequality is observed in Southern Asia (50.5), followed by East Asia (41.5) and South-East Asia (39.1).¹¹ In the Pacific, where the Gini coefficient is at 36.4, inequality is still identified as a critical policy issue.¹²

Furthermore, the region faces high levels of food insecurity. Just over a billion people experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2021, an increase of 343.5 million (48.9 percent) compared with 2014.¹³ Moreover, 396 million people were undernourished, and an estimated 75 million children below the age of five were stunted.¹⁴ The prevalence of obesity is rising across the region, with the Pacific Island states holding the highest prevalence of overweight and obesity in the world.¹⁵

4 World Economic Forum (2023). [Cohesive societies, competitive economies: how to tackle remaining poverty in Asia and the Pacific](#)

5 UNDP (2024). [Regional Human Development Report, Making Our Future: New Directions for Human Development in Asia and the Pacific](#)

6 UNDP (2022). [Inequality and social security in the Asia-Pacific region](#)

7 UNDP (2024). [Regional Human Development Report, Making Our Future: New Directions for Human Development in Asia and the Pacific](#)

8 ESCAP (2022). [Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2022: Economic Policies for an Inclusive Recovery and Developing, Building Forward Fairer](#)

9 UNDP (2022). [Inequality and social security in the Asia-Pacific region](#)

10 The Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality.

11 UNDP (2022). [Inequality and social security in the Asia-Pacific region](#)

12 Ibid.

13 FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2023). [Asia and the Pacific – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2022. Urban food security and nutrition](#)

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

The Asia Pacific region is also one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world, with 12 of its countries listed in the top 30 of the World Risk Index.¹⁶ In 2022 alone, more than 140 disasters struck the region, affecting over 64 million people and causing economic damage estimated at USD 57 billion.¹⁷ Projections for 2030 suggest that climate change could exacerbate these challenges, potentially pushing millions more into extreme poverty due to disrupted food production, lower labour productivity and the impact of disasters on public infrastructure, housing and livelihoods.¹⁸ These recurrent shocks and stressors contribute to persistent hunger, poverty, vulnerability and inequality.

2.2 Regional social protection landscape

Over the past decade, social protection systems across the Asia and Pacific region have witnessed substantial expansion, representing an important contribution to the region's social development and economic growth. During this period, social protection investments rose, primarily because of increases in social insurance expenditure, as well as the expansion of social protection coverage, particularly health insurance programmes.¹⁹ In addition, many

new programmes have been launched, some expanded, more benefits included, and both contributory and non-contributory schemes extended.²⁰

Despite progress, 55.9 per cent of the population in the region still do not have access to any form of social protection,²¹ with significant geographical disparities across sub-regions. The region has also a relatively low level of public expenditure on social protection, amounting to 7.5 per cent of GDP annually, with half the countries spending 2.6 per cent or less on social protection. This is significantly below the global average of 12.9 per cent.²²

Governments have progressively enhanced their social protection systems to better support people in achieving food security, although some challenges remain. Key advancements include the implementation of cash transfer programmes targeting the first 1000 days of child development in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Myanmar; the integration of large-scale food fortification into social protection programmes in India and Bangladesh; and the expansion of school-based programmes in several countries, including Indonesia, Cambodia, Bhutan, Nepal and the Philippines.

16 Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (2023). World Risk Index Report 2023

17 ESCAP (2023). [Asia-Pacific disaster report 2023: Seizing the moment: targeting transformative disaster risk resilience](#)

18 ESCAP (2022). [Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2022: Economic Policies for an Inclusive Recovery and Developing, Building Forward Fairer](#)

19 ADB (2022). [The Social Protection Indicator for Asia: Tracking Developments in Social Protection](#); and ADB (2022). [The Social Protection Indicator for the Pacific: Tracking Developments in Social Protection](#)

20 ILO (2021). [World Social Protection Report 2020-2022: Regional companion for Asia and the Pacific](#)

21 Ibid

22 Ibid

Box 1: Social protection to enhance food security and nutrition

The design and implementation of social protection in Asia and the Pacific focuses primarily on reducing poverty, often overlooking food security and nutrition as key objectives, despite high rates of food insecurity and undernutrition in the region.²³ Objectives for social protection usually focus on reducing income poverty and smoothing household consumption, while objectives related to nutrition are, at best, indirect. While most social assistance measures, such as cash transfers in the form of child grants, family benefits, and social pensions, increase income which can in turn increase food consumption, many of them do not have specific nutritional outcomes, and do not provide support that effectively ensures peoples' access to a nutritious diet, improve their consumption habits, and secure adequate supply of nutritious food.²⁴

Nonetheless, the region has made progress in leveraging social protection to improve food security and nutrition. Some countries have targeted programmes that focus on the first 1000 days from conception to a child's second birthday—a period increasingly acknowledged as critical for tackling malnutrition. For instance, the governments of Pakistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh have implemented cash transfer programmes combined with social behaviour communication strategies targeting pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under 24 months of age to address chronic malnutrition.

Many countries have integrated large-scale food fortification into their national social protection programmes to provide nutritionally adequate diets at a lower cost. India, for example, has mainstreamed fortified rice in all three of its food-based social assistance programmes, reaching over 400 million people. Bangladesh is also a leader in the area having moved towards public financing of large-scale food fortification programmes. The country has seen an increase from 30,000 people receiving fortified rice through social assistance programmes in 2013 to over 15 million in 2022.

School-based programmes are recognised as key to support the nutrition status of school-age children through the provision of nutritious meals. Several governments, including Nepal and Cambodia, are transitioning towards providing universal provision of school meals through government-run programmes. In Bhutan, India and the Philippines, governments are continuing to improve programme quality with technical assistance from WFP.

23 WFP (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](#)

24 FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2019). [Placing Nutrition at the Centre of Social Protection. Asia and the Pacific Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2019](#)

The region has a longstanding history of utilising social protection measures to address large-scale shocks such as typhoons, cyclones, floods, and earthquakes. More recently, COVID-19 and the inflation crisis saw a significant investment and expansion of social protection,

accompanied by innovative approaches in beneficiary identification and registration, the introduction of digital payment systems, and the development of inclusive grievance redressal mechanisms.^{25,26}

Box 2: Social protection to manage risks and shocks

Social protection is widely recognised as a tool for managing disaster risks and mitigating the impact of various shocks in the Asia and Pacific region. Examples of rapid and slow onset shocks addressed through social protection systems include typhoons and cyclones (Indonesia, India, Fiji and the Philippines), floods (Pakistan, India, Nepal, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh), earthquakes (Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Bhutan, and Tajikistan), rising sea levels (Fiji and Samoa), the displacement of conflict-affected populations (Afghanistan and Myanmar), and more recently COVID-19, with almost all Asia Pacific countries using social protection as part of their response strategies.

Adaptive and shock-responsive social protection strategies and frameworks exist in an increasing number of countries, including Cambodia, Fiji, and the Philippines. Lao PDR, Samoa, and Timor-Leste also have policies that reference shock responsive social protection and have experience implementing emergency cash transfers. Several prominent regional frameworks, including the [ASEAN's Guidelines on Disaster Responsive Social Protection](#), anchor the concept of adaptive and shock responsiveness in regional policy dialogues.

While the use of social protection to manage risks and shocks is increasing, key challenges remain, including the inability of many social assistance programmes to respond or continue functioning during large-scale shocks; a lack of integrated risk financing options linked to existing social protection programmes to enable timely scalability; and fragmented governance and coordination between disaster management and social protection institutions.

25 ESCAP (2020). Social protection responses to COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific: the story so far and future considerations

26 UNDP (2021). Next Practices: Innovations in the COVID-19 social protection responses and beyond





3

WFP's support for social protection in Asia and the Pacific

In Asia Pacific, WFP has decades of experience supporting national social protection programmes reach communities with cash and food transfers, school feeding, and food assistance for assets. Leveraging its experience and earlier investment in different sectors (disaster risk management, education and health), WFP is shifting attention towards strengthening institutions and systems that deliver social protection and providing specialised support when required. In alignment with [WFP's global social protection strategy](#), WFP's social protection work in Asia Pacific is guided by two priorities:

1



Social protection that helps people to meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs

2



Social protection that helps people to manage risks and shocks

WFP supports all aspects of national social protection systems including an enabling environment that steers the sector (system architecture), the programmes that deliver benefits and services (programme features), and cross-cutting processes of evidence generation, knowledge, learning and monitoring. More specifically:

- WFP supports the enabling environment and platforms that facilitate programme delivery systemwide, providing strategic and technical advice to strengthen policies and legislation, institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms, and systems and processes for planning and financing.

- WFP supports the design and/or delivery of specific social protection programmes, such as cash and in-kind assistance programmes, including school meals, and access to complementary services such as health and nutrition. This includes support to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and shock-responsiveness of targeting and registration processes, delivery mechanisms and grievance redress systems in line with programme objectives.
- WFP facilitates evidence-based decision-making through innovative data analysis approaches, ranging from food security, socio-economic and climate risk assessments to in-depth social protection analysis, and supports advocacy strategies to highlight the importance of social protection in addressing multidimensional vulnerability including in the face of increasing climate- and weather-related risks and shocks.

Figure 1. Overview of WFP’s social protection building blocks as part of social protection systems

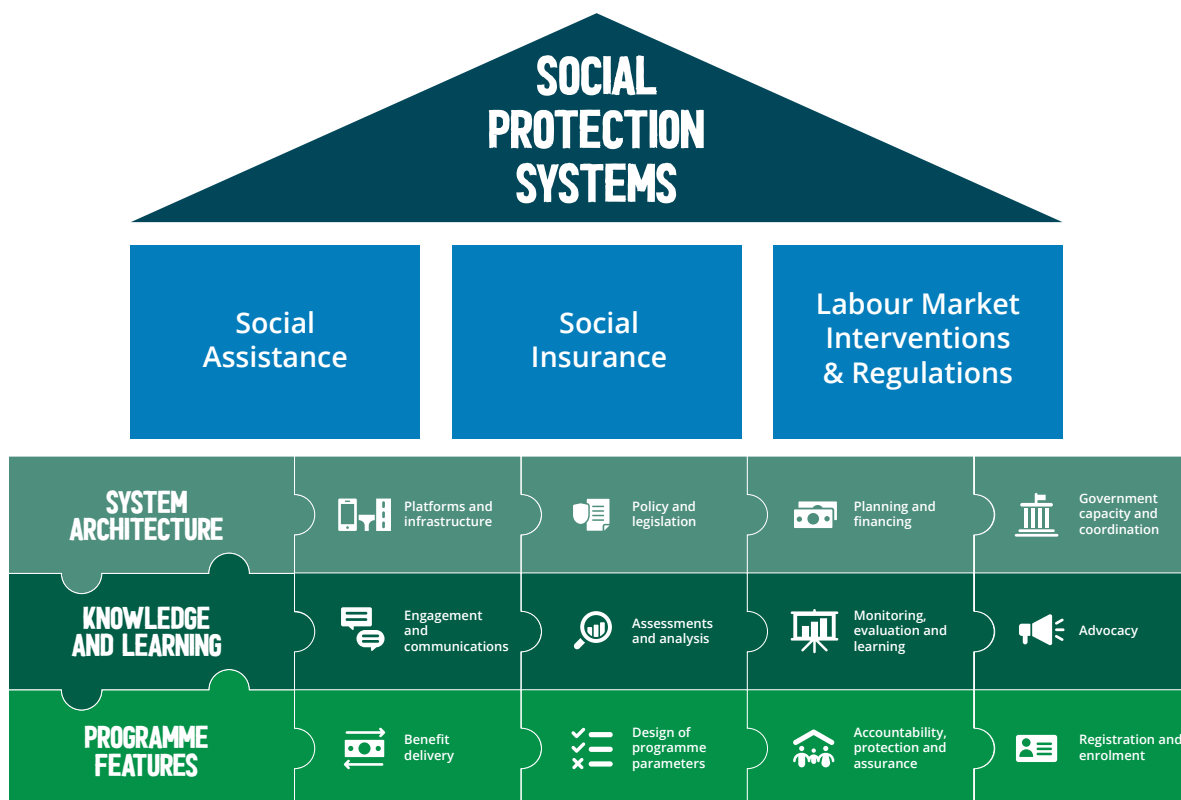
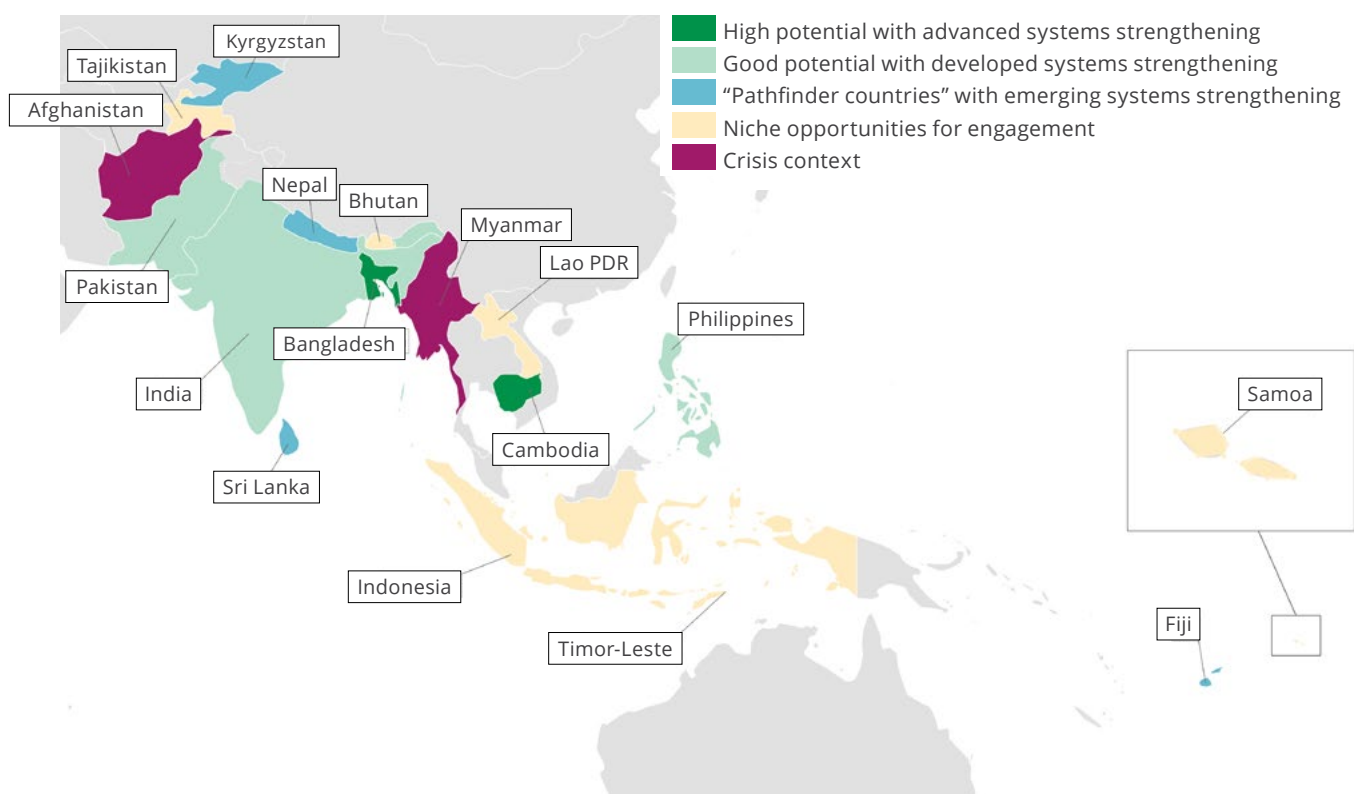


Figure 2 highlights the countries where WFP supports national social protection systems and programmes. The countries are categorised based on the maturity of their social protection systems cross-referenced with WFP’s in-country capabilities and opportunities to support social protection activities. Countries are defined as either having ‘high’ or ‘good’ potential for WFP continued engagement, ‘pathfinder’ for countries where WFP has emerging opportunities, and

‘nascent’ for those countries where WFP has the potential to support social protection systems, but efforts are at initial stages or smaller scale. A fifth category for ‘crisis contexts’ captures Afghanistan and Myanmar, where engagement with the governmental authorities is currently not possible and different operating models are required.

Figure 2. Map of system strengthening opportunities in countries where WFP operate



Regional priority 1 - Social protection that helps people meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs

WFP advocates for and supports the integration of food security and nutrition outcomes in social protection institutional frameworks, policy and interventions. This includes strategic and technical support to better align social protection strategies with the health, education and agriculture sectors to maximise food security and harness food systems; integrate social and behaviour change communication activities to catalyse changes in nutrition behaviours and dietary norms; promote the integration of food fortification in social protection programmes; and support the design and delivery of programmes targeting nutritionally vulnerable groups, such as pregnant

and breastfeeding women and children under two years of age. In addition, WFP generates data through tools such as the Cost of a Nutritious Diet and [Fill the Nutrient Gap](#) to identify barriers to accessing and consuming healthy and nutritious food and to inform social policy and programming.

Furthermore, WFP works with governments to implement food security and nutrition interventions, for example by strengthening government's capacities to implement school-based programmes to ensure that food-insecure schoolchildren eat a safe, nutritious and diverse meal each day. In countries where these programmes are absent or being established, WFP provides operational assistance to transition programmes to national ownership and in scale up.

Box 3. Country examples: Social protection that helps people meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs

Pakistan: The government partnered with WFP to design and implement the Benazir Nashonuma Programme to address chronic malnutrition. The programme provides comprehensive support to pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under 24 months of age who are enrolled in the Benazir Income Support Programme, including the provision of nutritious food, medical examinations, awareness training on maternal, infant, and young child nutrition practices, and conditional cash transfers. WFP has become one of the key partners in its implementation, providing the nutrition assistance component on behalf of the government, reaching 1.3 million pregnant and breastfeeding women and young children in 2023.

India: The government of India collaborated with WFP to implement a unique 'pilot-to-scale' approach, carrying out four sequential large-scale pilots to test and demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of including fortified rice in different social assistance programmes, gradually building the evidence and momentum for integration of fortified rice in social assistance programmes country wide. After nearly a decade of pilots, engagement and advocacy, in 2021 the national government committed to mainstreaming fortified rice in all three of its food-based social assistance programmes.²⁷ WFP also works with the government of India to scale-up the supply chain optimisation of the Targeted Public Distribution System, reaching over 800 million people monthly.

Bangladesh: The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs partnered with WFP to design and implement the Mother and Child Benefit Programme, a cash transfer programme aimed at ensuring newborns and young children under 4 years of age receive adequate nutrition. WFP contributed to enhancing the nutritional impact of the programme by strengthening the social behavioural change communication component and improving linkages with health services.

²⁷ WFP (2022). [The proof is in the pilot: 9 insights from India's rice fortification pilot-to-scale approach](#)

Regional priority 2 - Social protection that helps people to manage risks and shocks

WFP works with governments on enhancing social protection systems to help people prepare for, respond to and recover from shocks, as well as build adaptive capacities. WFP provides strategic and operational guidance to governments to develop adaptive and shock-responsive social protection systems and programmes through policy support and legislative reforms, strategic planning, inter-sectoral coordination, programme design and delivery, monitoring and evaluation, and innovative risk financing options.

WFP works with governments to better respond to the adverse impacts of shocks, including providing hazard mapping and climate and disaster risk analysis, designing and testing models for climate-smart targeting, supporting the development of social protection information

systems to integrate risk data, enhancing assured payment and digital delivery systems, and supporting operation planning such as developing scalability protocols, simulation exercises and standard operating procedures. Moreover, WFP supports the integration of social protection in disaster risk management planning and risk financing strategies to improve the speed and predictability of reaching affected populations, ensuring timely and effective assistance in the event of disasters and in the recovery and resilience building phases. In fragile and conflict-affected countries, such as Afghanistan and Myanmar, WFP develops tailored approaches that often by necessity work in parallel to government social protection systems but, where possible, are aligned to them. In these contexts, WFP advocates for transforming short-term humanitarian interventions into longer-term processes that promote resilience, peace, and stabilisation.

Box 4. Country examples: Social protection that helps people to manage risks and shocks

Cambodia: Commissioned by the General Secretariat for the National Social Protection Council, WFP supported the formulation of a national shock-responsive social protection framework to guide decision-making across government and development partners in future crisis responses and ensure that the most vulnerable populations have access to assistance for shocks. Building on this, WFP has recently completed an operational plan for the framework, and jointly with GIZ and UNICEF, is providing technical assistance for prioritised systems strengthening.

Fiji: The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, in partnership with WFP, designed a United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund multipurpose anticipatory cash pilot, aimed at supporting the most vulnerable populations living in locations at high risk of cyclones. The intervention will provide 15,000 households with cash transfers channelled through the national social protection system within 5 to 3 days prior to the impact of the cyclone, along with early warning messages and preparedness assistance. This represents a pioneering effort in the Asia Pacific region to systematically institutionalise a risk finance mechanism into a scalable social protection programme.²⁸

Afghanistan: Following the regime change in 2021, WFP has been unable to integrate its work in government systems. However, with support from the World Bank, WFP is implementing the World Bank-funded Mother and Child Benefit Programme, a safety net approach that aims to support basic needs through more predictable assistance, which can layer in additional interventions such as financial and economic inclusion activities and social services. WFP is also collaborating with UNICEF and the World Bank to develop an ad interim social protection strategy aligned with the United Nations system's transitional framework for Afghanistan.

28 WFP (2024). [Supercharging social protection systems with anticipatory cash: Case study on Fiji's Anticipatory Action Framework](#)



WFP Cash Assistance

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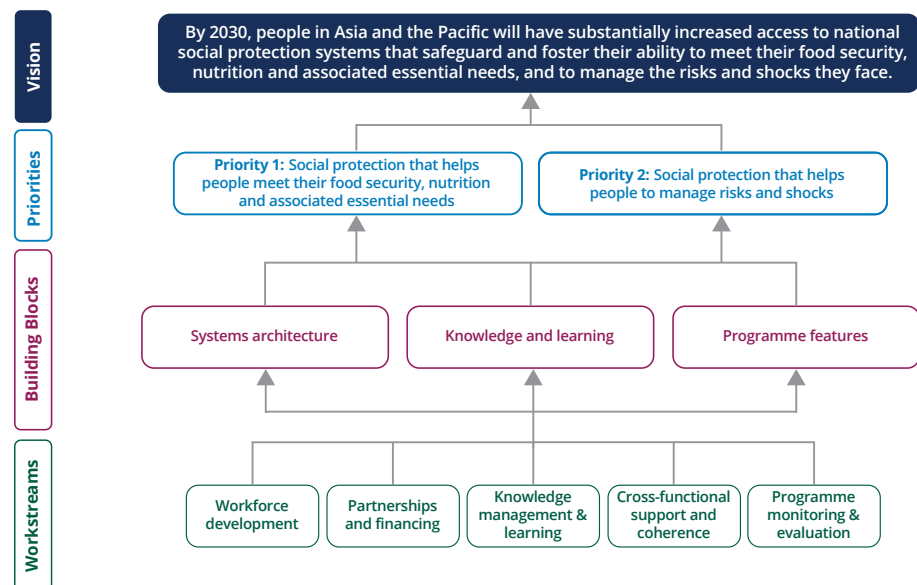


4

Implementation arrangements for WFP in the region

Achieving WFP’s two regional priorities requires WFP to focus its internal approach and investments in five prioritised workstreams: i) strengthening the social protection workforce; ii) forging stronger strategic partnerships; iii) advancing knowledge management and learning processes; iv) ensuring better internal coherence and cross-functional support and; v) improving monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Conceptual framework for WFP’s social protection implementation plan for Asia and the Pacific



The subsequent sub-sections provide a brief overview of WFP’s key progress in each workstream, followed by an outline of the strategic actions WFP proposes to implement across these areas for the period 2024-2028.

Workstream 1: Workforce development

Objective: Enhance WFP's social protection workforce to fulfil the ambitions outlined in national Country Strategic Plans and regional and global implementation plans.

Progress

To address the increasing demand for social protection support, WFP has significantly expanded its social protection workforce in the region, doubling the number of dedicated staff over the past two years and scaling up its efforts to strengthen their capacities through both in-person and online trainings. Additional capacity building initiatives include conducting technical assistance missions, providing mentoring and on-the-job support and developing region-specific guidance on nutrition-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection.

Way Forward

To bolster efforts in consolidating a social protection workforce that can meet the growing demands in the region, WFP will develop a regional social protection workforce capacity strategy, which will focus on strengthening the capabilities of current staff, expanding relevant workforce, and optimising the use of external experts. This will include establishing a senior long-term social protection workforce aligned with country-specific needs and hiring specialised expertise for priority thematic areas including financing, digital social protection, and policy analysis and advocacy.

This will be complemented by greater use of structured learning, job exchanges and mission shadowing, and regular training opportunities for social protection focal points and other cross functional staff. In addition, WFP will expand use of long-term agreements with research institutions, think tanks and consultancy firms, enhancing its capacity to deliver tailored technical assistance that meets specific country needs.

Workstream 2: Partnerships and funding

Objective: Build and maintain strategic partnerships with governments, development partners, donors, research institutions, and other key stakeholders to enhance investments in and contributions to social protection systems.

Progress

WFP is strengthening and expanding strategic partnerships with international financial institutions, United Nations agencies and bilateral donors to better support governments with social protection policies, systems and programme reforms and expansion. This support has been channelled, amongst other things, towards legislation reform for school based programmes and cash-based social assistance and shock responsive social protection strategies; development of data solutions and social protection information systems, including links to anticipatory action; piloting and rolling out national nutrition sensitive social assistance programmes and safety nets, including in crisis contexts; designing guidance manuals, scalability protocols and operational contingency plans; and monitoring programmes at field level and building evidence for operational and strategic planning across ministries.

Host governments set the agenda but have also emerged as an important source of support for WFP's social protection work, such as the partnerships with the governments of Pakistan and India. Building relationships with bilateral donors has been instrumental in raising catalytic funding and co-financing to leverage larger social protection funds in several countries, including in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Indonesia. It has also enabled the piloting of innovation in shock-responsive social protection and linkages to climate and disaster risk financing and insurance. WFP has expanded its regional collaboration with development partners to contribute to the knowledge generation on social protection

(see next workstream), through regional fora with the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and through United Nations inter-agency regional groups including the Issues Based Coalitions.

WFP recognises that new models of funding are necessary to fill gaps in social protection systems. To this end, WFP has established partnerships with the private sector, including collaborations with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on fortification, and around climate and disaster risk finance and insurance with social protection through the Global Shield, the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund, and the Southeast Asia Disaster Risk Insurance Facility and the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company, two regional insurance risk pools.

Way Forward

WFP will develop a regional strategy to guide regional and country resource mobilisation efforts for social protection, aimed at increasing multi-year funding, co-financing and leveraging synergies with other thematic funding portfolios. It will be informed by an analysis of key donor and government policies to align with their priorities and identify opportunities for strategic and technical collaboration at country level. As part of the strategy's implementation, WFP will enhance national partnership engagements for social protection, with a focus on advancing partnership building with governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organisations, climate and disaster risk finance and insurance institutions, and the private sector. Simultaneously, WFP will continue to strengthen their ongoing engagement with international financial institutions in the areas of nutrition-sensitive social assistance and evidence building, shock-responsive and adaptive social protection, integrated data systems, and enhancing government analytical capacities.

In addition, WFP will promote greater integration of its social protection and climate change portfolios and links to climate finance including

proactively engaging with governments, key stakeholders and donors to enable more effective, resilient and people-centred responses to climate change and weather-related disasters, aligning to [WFP's global thought leadership on this issue](#). Collaboration with bilateral donors will be broadened, seeking catalytic funding to demonstrate successful approaches, build evidence, and support governments to scale up.

Workstream 3: Knowledge management and learning

Objective: Enhance the evidence base for social protection at both regional and country levels to inform policy direction and address information needs.

Progress

WFP has significantly enhanced its knowledge management and learning efforts for social protection, centred around a regional strategy that guides the generation, dissemination and promotion of evidence. A similar tool has been developed to support country offices to capture, streamline and disseminate knowledge products to enhance government decision making and policy development, increase the visibility of government programmes, and support WFP's advocacy and partnership efforts. This range of regional and country based knowledge and research products includes [regional briefing notes](#), [social protection scoping studies](#), regional analysis on [digital financial inclusion](#), [climate and disaster risk finance and insurance](#), social registries, costing studies for using social protection for emergency response in [Bangladesh](#) and the Philippines, country case studies on WFP's long-term support in strengthening national social protection systems in [Cambodia](#) and [India](#), and climate-sensitive targeting studies in Sri Lanka and Lao PDR. Internal knowledge management is facilitated through a dedicated portal and community of practice platform.

Way Forward

WFP will continue its knowledge management and learning efforts around two priority areas: nutrition-sensitive social protection, and adaptive and shock-responsive social protection. This will include an expansion of its regional and global partnerships with research institutions and thought leaders to generate evidence, analysis, and learning around key emerging themes of interest to the social protection community in Asia Pacific.

Under priority 1, activities will include guidance on nutrition-sensitive social protection and producing evidence that influence strategies to prevent and/or manage wasting through social protection, in alignment with new [WHO Guidelines 2023](#); and country analysis, such as the Cost of a Nutritious Diet, Fill the Nutrient Gap and Minimum Expenditure Basket assessments, to inform the design of nutrition-sensitive social protection interventions.

Under priority 2, WFP will develop a regional framework on adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, and, across the region, activities will include generating operational evidence, guidance and tools on enhancing the linkages between climate and disaster risk financing and insurance and social protection systems. WFP will expand its efforts on digital solutions for social protection, including support to social registries, assured payments and integrated data analytics. Across both priorities, WFP will continue to disseminate its knowledge and evidence products in regional and global fora to maximise impact and reach.

Workstream 4: Cross-functional support and coherence

Objective: Strengthen institutional coherence and organisational integration of social protection across HQ, regional, and country levels, ensuring alignment with other programme areas.

Progress

WFP is promoting institutional coherence and organisational integration of social protection with other programme areas. Detailed country scoping studies have helped identify cross-functional entry points, including linkages with WFP's work on [anticipatory action](#), climate, nutrition, school meals, emergency, livelihoods and complementarities with the digital innovation portfolio. Several country offices are already implementing cross-functional interventions in these priority areas, including for example, the use of digital innovation in [Cambodia](#) to build social protection linkages into climate vulnerability mapping, approaches to build nutrition sensitivity into the social protection system in Pakistan, fortification of rice-based social assistance programmes for nutrition outcomes in [Bangladesh](#) and Indonesia, and strengthening linkages between social protection, macro insurance and anticipatory action programmes in [Fiji](#).

To support these processes, WFP has employed a variety of approaches to enhance cross-functional thinking and programming at country level, including joint technical country support missions, the development of guidance and tools to design and implement cross-functional interventions, and the organisation of social protection trainings and workshops involving other WFP teams working in nutrition, school-based programmes, emergencies, and climate, as well as external partners.

Way Forward

WFP will expand its cross-functional strategic approach to social protection. WFP will enable a pathway to fostering synergies between social protection and other thematic areas through strategic and technical guidance aligned to national development plans and WFP country strategic plans, under the aegis of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Simultaneously, WFP will enhance south-south and peer-to-peer learning across government ministries (within and across countries), and work with regional and country programme units to identify and leverage cross-cutting opportunities. This effort will include supporting the development of social protection roadmaps that outline a medium- to long-term strategic vision for social protection, incorporating cross-functional linkages where relevant with climate, nutrition, cash transfers, supply chain, humanitarian response, digital services, and evaluation.

Workstream 5: Planning, monitoring and evaluation

Objective: Produce robust evidence on the impact and effectiveness of WFP's social protection programming, and effectively monitor its contribution to strengthening social protection systems.

Progress

WFP recognises the importance of producing robust evidence to measure the impact of its social protection work and effectively monitor its contribution, as well as to guide the policy choices of government partners and donors. In this regard, WFP has recently produced a [summary of social protection evidence](#) at global level, which brings together findings from 44 WFP country evaluations, covering the period

2018-2023, including in Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Timor Leste and the Philippines.

In addition, WFP has significantly enhanced its systems and tools to adequately monitor its social protection activities and achievements across WFP's Corporate Results Framework 2022-2025, including guidance for country offices to embed social protection in their strategic plans.

Way Forward

WFP is committed to expanding the development of robust evidence on nutrition-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection, including impact studies and cost-effectiveness analyses. These efforts aim to underscore the social and economic benefits of social protection for investment cases for government, and demonstrate the value for money that WFP brings to social protection interventions. Upcoming impact assessments for social protection initiatives focused on enhancing the quality and efficiency of national systems in Asia and the Pacific will start with projects in the Philippines and Bangladesh. WFP will also enhance indicator integration across its country strategic plans, including quantitative and qualitative indicators to better capture and measure social protection country capacity strengthening in alignment with [WFP's Country Capacity Strengthening Policy](#).

Summary of prioritised actions

The table below summarises the priority actions WFP will implement in Asia and the Pacific to advance national social protection objectives for the period 2024-2028, mapped against the five workstreams of its regional social protection implementation plan outlined above.

Workstream 1 – Workforce development

Objective: Enhance WFP’s social protection workforce to fulfil the ambitions outlined in national Country Strategic Plans and regional and global implementation plans.

Develop a regional social protection workforce capacity strengthening strategy focused on building the capabilities of current WFP staff, hiring new relevant positions, and optimising the use of external experts.

Strengthen regional and country social protection workforce through structured learning, job exchanges, mission shadowing and regular training opportunities.

Enhance investments to establish a permanent senior social protection workforce and recruit specialised expertise to fill priority thematic areas.

Leverage global long-term agreements to obtain additional short-term expertise in social protection on an as-needed basis.

Workstream 2 – Partnerships and funding

Objective: Build and maintain strategic partnerships with governments, development partners, donors, research institutions, and other key stakeholders to enhance investments in and contributions to social protection systems.

Develop a regional strategy to guide regional and country resource mobilisation efforts for social protection.

Strengthen ongoing social protection engagement with international financial institutions and bilateral donors.

Increase efforts on new and innovative and co-financing opportunities with a focus on climate and disaster risk finance and insurance, and nutrition sensitive investments.

Workstream 3 – Knowledge and learning

Objective: Enhance the evidence base for social protection at both regional and country levels to inform policy direction and address information needs.

Expand evidence generation efforts around the two priority areas: nutrition-sensitive social protection, and adaptive and shock-responsive social protection.

Further develop partnerships with regional and global institutions to deepen WFP’s knowledge impact and reach.

Develop social protection knowledge management country plans and advocacy strategies to effectively inform and influence policy and programme decision-making processes.

Workstream 4 – Cross-functional support and coherence

Objective: Strengthen institutional coherence and organisational integration of social protection across HQ, regional, and country levels, ensuring alignment with other programme areas.

Foster synergies between social protection and other thematic areas through strategic and technical guidance aligned to country strategic plans.

Enhance the capacity of regional and country programme units to identify and leverage cross-cutting opportunities, including through South-South exchange.

Workstream 5 – Planning, monitoring and evaluation

Objective: Produce robust evidence on the impact and effectiveness of WFP’s social protection programming, and effectively monitor its contribution to strengthening social protection systems.

Expand the development of robust evidence on nutrition-sensitive, and adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, including impact studies and evaluations and cost-effectiveness analyses.

Support efforts to refine country capacity strengthening indicators for social protection.

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