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WFP Regional Bureau for West Africa (RBD)

Social Protection Newsletter *2024 – A year in review*

The World Food Programme in Western Africa continues supporting governments in their efforts to build social protection systems across the region, focusing on their ability to help people manage risks and shocks, while contributing to food security and improved nutrition.

This 2024 year-in-review news update provides key highlights from across the region, with WFP's work on social protection sitting at the crossroads of social protection programme delivery, support to national systems, and seeking convergence points with partners for scaled-up coverage.

WFP's approach to social protection

Social protection systems play a vital role on the road to [achieving a Zero Hunger world](#). Effective and at-scale investments and interventions that address poverty and vulnerability can help the most vulnerable individuals and households better cope with the threats to their food security and nutrition, oftentimes [driven by cycles of chronic poverty and vulnerability](#).

As such, social protection programmes provide support to people in need, helping them meet their basic needs without compromising the quantity and quality of their food intake, and without pushing them to last-resort coping mechanisms to meet these needs, such as taking children out of school, selling off their productive assets, depleting their savings or abandoning their lands altogether. Social protection is also vital to resilience building and, ultimately, lays the foundations for more prosperous and peaceful societies, where people can invest in their human capital and where communities enjoy a [strong social fabric and social cohesion](#).

In doing so, social protection creates [pathways to tackling some of the root causes of hunger and malnutrition](#). National social protection systems have the potential to improve the lives of billions of people, and in a more cost-efficient fashion than recurrent humanitarian response alone.

At WFP, we partner with governments and others to establish and strengthen national systems to maximize the impact of our technical and operational expertise in the most cost-effective way. Our global field presence and our history of reaching people in need in diverse and challenging contexts, including many communities living in conflict-afflicted areas or fragile settings, mean we can put at the service of governments a wealth of

guidance and assistance to help safeguard food security and nutrition today and [address underlying drivers of vulnerability, promoting resilience, human capital investments, and dignified livelihoods](#) for all in the pursuit of Zero Hunger.

[WFP's strategy on social protection](#), therefore, builds on our crosscutting experience, offering a coordinating framework that outlines how we will systematically support efforts to achieve long-term national social protection goals, while continuing our work responding to hunger emergencies. It is informed by a range of operational and analytical evidence that illustrated how social protection activities help WFP deliver on its mandate and enable governments to meet their global commitments. We believe that effective social protection policies are a way to make a real and lasting difference for billions of the world's most vulnerable people as we work together on saving lives and changing lives.

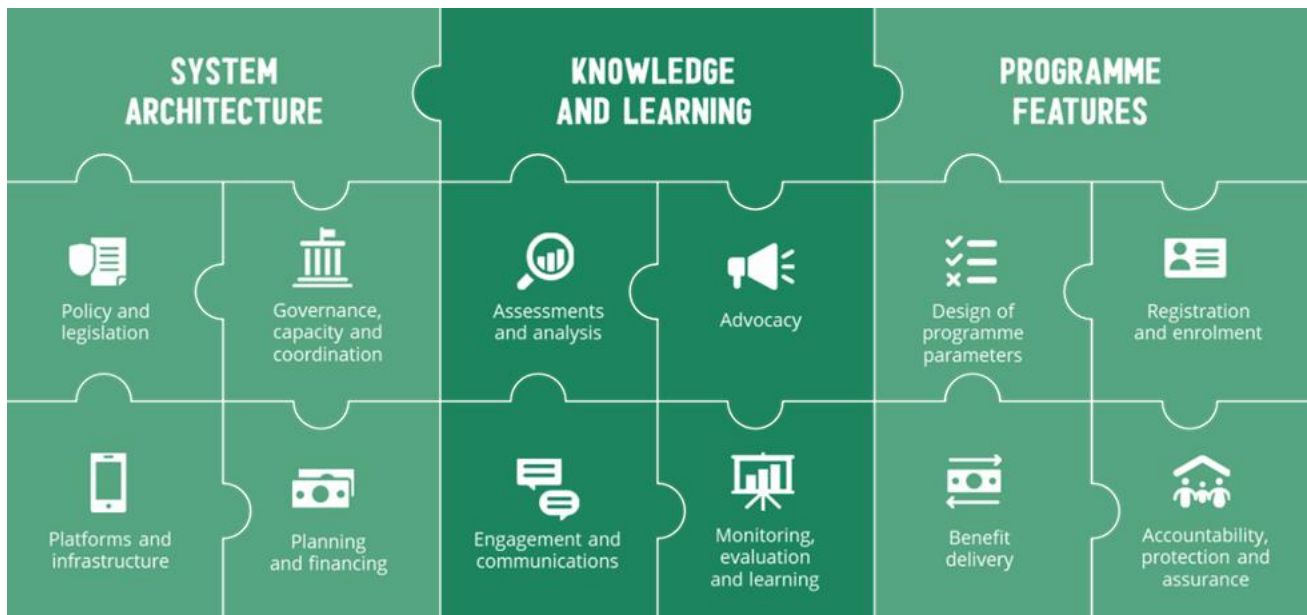
WFP also plays a role in supporting governments to strengthen [the shock-responsive functions](#) of social protection, working across systems, building on our expertise. In this role, working in strong partnership with governments as well as development partners and international financial institutions is key. Our vision in West Africa is to position social protection as a key investment case to support food security and nutrition, while also supporting governments in strengthening the inter-sectoral coordination and implementing the necessary policy and programme to achieve this objective. This translates into two main, interlinked priorities: **(i)** supporting the linkages between social protection and nutrition and **(ii)** embedding social protection in strategies to support a food security

continuum (in structural and seasonal responses to food insecurity).

To implement these priorities, WFP supports the design and delivery of nationally led social protection systems, providing strategic and technical advice, and/or implementing programmes on governments' behalf. In addition, WFP's programmes ensure a complementarity with

national social protection systems, which can also function in the absence of State-led services. For WFP, national social protection systems comprise **12 building blocks**. Together, they represent the enabling environment that steers the wider systems architecture, the programmes that deliver services and support to those in need, and the-cutting processes of advocacy, knowledge and learning.

Building blocks of a national social protection system



Supporting governments and systems at national level

Advancing national social protection systems and policies

[Guinea-Bissau's](#) SDG Fund Joint Project (2022-2024), implemented by WFP, UNICEF, and UNFPA provided significant support to building the national social protection system. This included facilitating the elaboration and adoption of a [national social protection policy](#) and carrying out a costing of the social protection strategy implemented by WFP. The project also delivered unconditional [cash transfers to 1,500 food-insecure households](#) in Bolama Bijagós, Tombali, and Gabu regions. Complementary efforts included the design of a framework for a national [social registry](#). Together, these activities provided insights into a future national safety net programme, bolstering country ownership. Building on this momentum, WFP, UNICEF, and UNFPA are discussing the continuation of joint technical support, including conducting a capacity strengthening gap analysis for social



protection. Joint efforts have already led to recent trainings on [integrating disaster risk management in social protection](#).

In [Nigeria](#), WFP is supporting the country's [nutrition-sensitive social protection agenda](#). Malnutrition remains a critical issue in Nigeria, which bears the highest burden of malnutrition in Africa. Despite considerable investments, there are still important gaps to be addressed. As such, Nigeria stands to ensure that social protection interventions support access to services, support adequate nutrition practices, and facilitate access to adequate and nutritious diets. To this end, WFP is providing technical support to the government in developing a [Social and Behavioural Change \(SBC\) strategy](#) links cash transfers to improved nutrition outcomes, with specific guidance for national and state-level implementation. By facilitating the development of integrated SBC protocols and stakeholder engagement, WFP has enabled Nigeria to establish pathways to enhance nutrition outcomes and gender equality within the [flagship Household Uplifting Programme](#). Capacity-strengthening initiatives and a collaborative validation of deliverables, laying the foundation for operationalizing the SBC strategy in 2025.

The region is also showing how social protection is increasingly utilized to build resilience and promote economic inclusion. In [Ghana](#), with funding from the Gates Foundation, WFP has been working closely with the [Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty \(LEAP\) cash transfer programme](#) to enhance the financial inclusion and economic empowerment of vulnerable households, with a particular focus on women. WFP has provided LEAP

beneficiaries with cash top-up payments together with literacy training, income-generating guidance, and mentorship, among other complementary measures. These combined efforts enable households to maximize the benefits of regular cash transfers, building resilience through timely and sufficient social protection while laying the groundwork for sustainable income-generating opportunities.



Beneficiaries have successfully invested in their human capital, improving their capacity to achieve resilience and independence beyond LEAP. Additionally, WFP has collaborated with the Government to identify pathways for financial and productive inclusion for LEAP beneficiaries, aiming to create opportunities for self-reliance after LEAP. To support this transition, WFP has provided technical and financial assistance for the reassessment of LEAP, including financing the training of district stakeholders to operationalize new guidelines and strengthen the programme's overall effectiveness.

Looking to [Benin](#), [Togo](#) and [Guinea](#), joint WFP-UNICEF-World Bank efforts have supported social protection coordination platforms to help guide policy discussions, harmonize initiatives from government and other actors, and ensure a coordinated support to governments.

WFP supported the review of [Benin's](#) National Social Protection Policy documents and participated in the different workshops organized by the Social

Protection Working Group to discuss and validate the policy. The final policy document and corresponding implementation plan were validated by the Council of Ministers in November 2024.

A joint WFP-UNICEF-World Bank effort in [Togo](#) working to revitalize the work of the Social Protection Working Group, including to map out existing social protection programmes and identify opportunities to harmonize social protection initiatives from government and partners. This coordination process has opened opportunities to discuss the Program-for-Results project, including the support from WFP and UNICEF. Meanwhile in [Guinea](#), WFP, UNICEF, and the World Bank are working with the National Directorate for Vulnerable People to coordinate the creation of a National Social Protection Working Group. A joint meeting will follow to elaborate terms of reference specifying the group's activities and membership and defining its roles and responsibilities.

[Social registries](#) across the region are proving to be indispensable tools for effective targeting and coordination within social protection systems. These registries capture household vulnerability dimensions, improving transparency, cost-efficiency and operational coordination.



In [The Gambia](#), WFP used registry data in its 2024 lean season response, integrating lists of households living in poverty and who are known to be vulnerable to cyclical food insecurity, together with lists from the National Disaster Management Agency of households affected by recent floods.

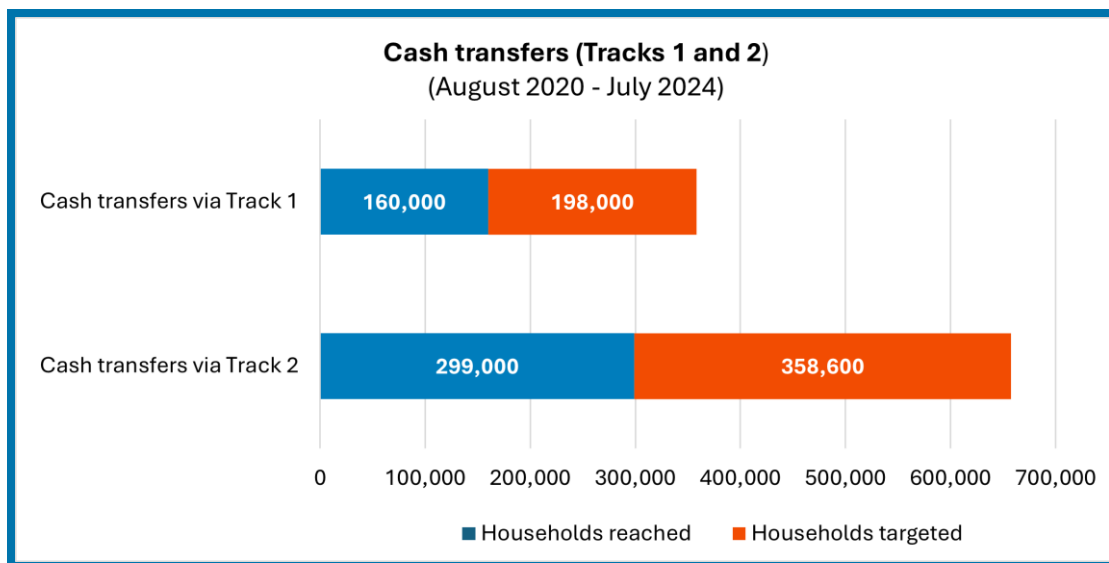
This enhanced targeting and timeliness of response. A subsequent after-action review conducted by WFP and partners identified updates needed to capture changing vulnerabilities and to [align lean season responses with future safety net programmes](#).



For its part, [Togo's](#) rollout of its [social registry](#) has received financial support and technical guidance by WFP and UNICEF, in addition to the creation of a coordination platform for resource partners to align efforts across programmes.

Sahelian countries have achieved significant milestones. Governments and partners in the [Sahel](#) are working together to invest in [social protection models that are agile, scalable, and reactive](#) to the increasing frequency of shocks in the region.

To this end, the Joint Project '*Responding to COVID-19 through social protection systems in the Sahel: Responding to the socioeconomic impacts of multiple shocks*' ([Sahel SP-JP](#)), implemented by UNICEF and WFP and financed by BMZ through KfW, continues supporting the Governments of [Mali](#), [Mauritania](#), and [Niger](#) to respond to shocks, helping strengthen national capacities to adapt and build more shock-responsive, nutrition-, and child-sensitive social protection systems. Since December 2023, the Sahel SP-JP extended its activities to [Burkina Faso](#) and [Chad](#) and focuses on addressing the socioeconomic impacts of multiple shocks in the region. As of July 2024, over [3.57 million people \(557,000 households\)](#) across [Burkina Faso](#), [Chad](#), [Mali](#), [Mauritania](#), and [Niger](#) have been targeted via a twin-track approach to shock-responsive cash transfer delivery, including over [2.95 million people \(460,000 households\)](#) already reached. A suite of complementary services has accompanied cash transfers, including nutrition education, health service referrals, child protection, and training and seed capital for financial inclusion ventures. To date, over [6.6 million people](#) have benefited from these complementary services across the five countries. Read more about the [twin-track approach](#) to delivering shock-responsive social protection,¹ including latest twin-track [best practices](#) in the region.²



Social registries across **the Sahel** countries are also making headway.

In **Burkina Faso**, **277,200 poor and vulnerable households** have been registered in the RSU, and WFP and UNICEF have developed an operational manual, for the RSU.

In **Chad**, WFP and UNICEF facilitated the universal registration of over **87,000 households** in three departments under the Sahel SP-JP, with additional efforts focusing on community outreach to promote the grievance redress mechanism.

Mali continues to improve RSU data collection and quality, incorporating data protection best practices, revising the RSU questionnaire to reduce workload and costs, and enhancing user-friendliness.

Since 2020, over **1 million households** have been registered, including **over 280,000** with direct Sahel SP-JP support.

As for **Mauritania**, WFP and UNICEF have supported nearly universal registration, covering almost **220,000 households** by mid-2024, while improving targeting, monitoring, and government platforms for cash distributions.

Niger, for its part, has benefited from knowledge exchanges with Mauritania, enabling RSU representatives to gain practical expertise in social registry design and operations, while UNICEF, WFP, and the World Bank have collaborated on a shared data collection mechanism for the registry and cash transfers. With ongoing registration efforts, close to **750,000 households** have been registered.

Learning from Niger's experience

Leveraging the twin-track approach to ensure continuous delivery

In **Niger**, the twin-track approach has been instrumental to expand shock-response coverage and reach populations that would not otherwise be covered by national programmes, including in hard-to-reach areas. Track 2 delivery of transfers allowed to double the coverage of national shock-response transfers in 2022 and quadruple it in 2023. During the second half of 2023, specifically following the July 2023 coup d'état, which meant that Track 1 transfers were halted and only Track 2 could be maintained, the twin-track approach proved critical to ensure continuity of the programme during the political crisis and disruptions to cash delivery through government channels.

Although delivered through complementary channels, Track 2 cash transfers must be treated as part and parcel of the same government programme and not as an ad hoc or a distinct intervention. In Niger, for example, the drought response implemented under Track 2 has relied on:

- ◆ Track 1 and Track 2 transfers being embedded into a national response plan.
- ◆ Following the same triggers and geographical prioritization logic as the government drought response, informed by national early warning systems.
- ◆ Having transfers of the same value and duration as from national programmes and using national coordination mechanisms.
- ◆ Household eligibility criteria that are progressively reflecting the criteria used for Track 1 delivery of transfers as the Social Registry expands registration to shock-prone areas.

(cont.) The twin-track approach also demonstrated its ability to **reduce delivery lead time** as well as **increased flexibility and agility** in the face of multiple evolving crises. Initially designed to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the approach has been used to address droughts, floods, and other shocks.

Leveraging existing tools is also key. In Niger, it has been a priority to build on what already works, helping the country invest in and improve its existing systems. For instance:

- ◆ Drought triggers and geographic prioritization parameters are consistent with the *Cadre Harmonisé* acute food insecurity assessments.
- ◆ As the Social Registry is expanded, drought response targeting will increasingly rely on this household registration data.

Recognizing that Track 2 is not just an alternative delivery mechanism has been key. Both tracks **operating as a continuum** has allowed the improvement of existing tools, including the Social Registry — which WFP is supporting, including in areas most prone to recurrent food insecurity — for enhanced targeting.

In contexts of fragility, all tracks are necessary and mutually reinforcing to address needs at scale and when most needed, and to build sustainable systems that are country-owned and country-led. In **Niger**, the twin-track approach is clearing the way and creating the space for all relevant partners to engage alongside national leadership, laying the foundation over which Track 1 transfers will ultimately be expanded.

Harmonizing social protection and emergency responses

Integrating social protection and emergency response systems remains a priority to address cyclical and protracted needs effectively.

In **Nigeria**, WFP is leading efforts to institutionalize **shock-responsive social protection** (SRSP) in the country, addressing a critical gap identified in the Revised National Social Protection Policy. While Nigeria's extensive social registry supports cash transfers for chronic poverty, acute vulnerabilities caused by shocks like floods, droughts, inflation, and conflicts remain insufficiently addressed. By contextualizing its five-step SRSP framework, WFP has completed three key stages in Nigeria: (i) raising

awareness and establishing an SRSP Technical Working Group with key national stakeholders, (ii) conducting a capacity needs assessment to identify institutional gaps, and (iii) strengthening capacities through peer learning missions and the development of integrated SRSP protocols.

These protocols define roles and responsibilities among government agencies, operationalizing a



triple nexus approach that bridges humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts.

With three stages of the framework completed, Nigeria is now better positioned to deploy SRSP mechanisms, particularly for recurrent shocks like flooding, solidifying its leadership in SRSP in the West Africa region.

In the **Gulf of Guinea**, where the spill-over from the Sahel crisis has exacerbated vulnerabilities in northern **Benin, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire**, and **Togo**, the role of social protection in **fostering resilience and economic inclusion** is central to WFP's approach in addressing the region's multifaceted challenges. The influx of refugees and new waves of internally displaced persons have added pressure on national response systems. In this context, social safety nets, supported by household data from social registries where available, provide a strategic mechanism to channel emergency funds through existing government programmes, enabling a more effective and sustainable response.

With this aim in mind, WFP is identifying opportunities in **Togo** to better **link emergency response in the North with existing national social protection systems**, aiming to leverage their potential to strengthen resilience and foster economic inclusion among affected populations. While in **Benin**, WFP, together with UNICEF and the World Bank, is working to channel emergency response funding through national social protection systems, promoting a more sustainable and cost-effective approach to protracted and cyclical needs. Advocacy efforts with Benin's National Civil Protection Agency emphasize **synergies between emergency response and social protection** to address interconnected needs and deprivations, while vulnerability analyses are helping identify the most at-risk households, including host communities and displaced populations, for integration into social protection programmes.

These efforts include the assessment and enhancement of social protection system capacities for shock-responsiveness, nutrition-sensitiveness, and the expansion of social registries to improve targeting and delivery. At the same time, the national coordination group supported by WFP and partners involves humanitarian and government actors to strengthen leadership and operational capacity for shock-responsive social protection, **integrating resilience-building and economic inclusion into emergency responses** to reduce long-term vulnerabilities.

In **Ghana**, LEAP offers a strategic entry point for integrating emergency responses for asylum seekers and host communities. Drawing on best practices from **Benin**, WFP has facilitated exchanges that informed a **'Resilience and Social Cohesion' programme** jointly developed with UNICEF and UNFPA. This initiative combines cash transfers with complementary services, such as financial literacy training, skills development programmes, and community-based support, fostering both immediate relief and long-term resilience.



Across the **Gulf of Guinea**, these efforts reflect a growing recognition of the potential for social protection systems to play a central role in national responses to complex emergencies. By integrating cash-based interventions with human capital investments and focusing on resilience-building, WFP and partners aim to reduce dependence on emergency aid and position social protection

systems as foundational tools for addressing vulnerabilities and fostering economic inclusion over time. [Aligning humanitarian response with social protection systems](#) stands to lead to stronger coordination among government and

humanitarian actors, with the group also working to assess national systems' shock-responsiveness, nutrition-sensitiveness, and overall capacity to address both immediate and long-term vulnerabilities.

Regional engagement: Strengthening social protection across West Africa

REDOUBLING EFFORTS IN RESPONSE TO A RISING NEED FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION IN THE SAHEL

Building on the success of the Sahel SP-JP, a [new phase of the project has received € 50 million funding](#) from BMZ/KfW for the period 2025-2028.

This new phase of the project will focus on supporting national social protection systems in the Sahel to promote a decent life for all, strengthen resilience, and contribute to stronger social cohesion. The Joint Project will work in collaboration with the World Bank's [Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program](#) (SASPP).



A shared vision for fragile contexts

COLLABORATION BETWEEN WFP, UNICEF AND THE WORLD BANK TO ALIGN STRATEGIES IN FRAGILE SETTINGS

WFP, UNICEF, and the World Bank have built a [strong partnership for adaptive social protection in the Sahel](#), with a common vision to strengthen the adaptive dimensions of national social protection systems. We have converged around common objectives: support the establishment of strong social protection systems in the Sahel, including the expansion of coverage of regular safety nets and the establishment of national programmes.

This partnership has been highlighted in many instances as a best practice. Our joint work is aligned around a joint conceptual framework to structure our joint and complementary support to the building blocks of national social protection systems. The three institutions have developed complementary programmes to operationalize this joint vision. Different mandates offer an opportunity for convergence of expertise around national systems and programmes, and we

understand that food security, nutrition, and poverty reduction priorities must be tackled in tandem, with social protection playing a critical role in the Sahel. As partners, we have focused on shared analyses, applying the [Stress Test Tool](#),³ among others, to better understand the state of adaptive social protection in the region, and prioritize support across system building blocks that include policy and governance, finance, programme design, and delivery mechanisms. We have organized further analysis and technical workshops to address critical elements such as operationalizing

social registries or developing national safety net programmes. As the partnership deepens, we will strive to translate regional collaboration more systematically to the country level. This will be key to institutionalize the agenda and develop synergies, by further deepening joint efforts and understanding the respective contributions and unique value and expertise of each of the entities in support to governments. This is critically relevant in the region, which is marked by conflict and fragility, requiring innovative approaches and partnerships to push forward the social protection agenda.

Strong partnership drives adaptive social protection in fragile settings WFP-UNICEF-World Bank blog post

In a [blog post](#)⁴ published on the [World Bank's Development for Peace blog series](#), the three entities shared insights on how walking a shared path can help jointly address concrete challenges in an increasingly complex part of the world, where rising and interconnected levels of need call for social protection to be expanded to and to become more adaptable or responsive to shocks.

Working in partnership to support the expansion of social protection is fundamental to address fragility in the region. WFP, UNICEF and the World Bank agree: there is a need to invest, including in domestic resources, for coverage expansion of national safety net programs with robust adaptive dimensions.

Read the full [blog post](#).



The food security and nutrition challenge What role for social protection in the Sahel?

The inaugural issue of the *Policy in Focus* magazine was recently launched during the G20 Social Summit in Rio de Janeiro. This special edition is a collaborative effort by WFP, the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Development (IPCid), and socialprotection.org. The issue, which centers on overcoming food security and nutrition roadblocks in social protection, saw the joint UNICEF-World Bank-WFP contribution on the renewed role of social protection in the Sahel.

Read the full issue [here](#).⁵

Untangling the causal relationship between social protection and social cohesion in the Sahel

Vulnerability, poverty, competition over natural resources, and lack of economic opportunities

have distended social bonds and fueled conflict in the Sahel, including terrorism, violent extremism, inter-ethnic, and agricultural-pastoral conflicts.

Temperatures in the Sahel region are also rising 1.5 times faster than the global average. As a **“threat multiplier,”** climate change exacerbates existing social, political, and economic tensions and conflicts. With existing problems of weak institutions and poor governance, internal power struggles, and corruption, governments have not been able to adequately respond to the questions and concerns of Sahelians regarding the negative impact of climate change, the need for economic development, food insecurity, violence, and displacement. Lack of trust in government and among various communities, marginalization, and deep-rooted grievances are widespread in the region. Policies and programmes that seek to address poverty and drives of vulnerability, such as social protection policies and programmes, have the potential to support social cohesion. However, untangling the relationship between social protection and social cohesion is essential to maximize this positive impact and prevent unintended detrimental dynamics.

In the context of their ongoing support for social protection in the Sahel, the **World Bank, WFP, and UNICEF have designed a joint research project focusing on identifying the multiple linkages**

between social protection and social cohesion.

This research aims to fill evidence gaps on the impacts of social protection on social cohesion and provide recommendations on how to tailor social protection programme design and delivery to maximize positive potential, while taking account of contextual features and dynamics. The basic aim of the research is to inform the design and implementation of social protection interventions in a manner that will do no harm and optimize positive contributions to social cohesion. The research project will use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to quantify the causal effects of social protection interventions (in particular social safety nets) on different dimensions of social cohesion, while shedding light on and understanding the channels through which these impacts manifest and the perspectives and perceptions from communities.

The first step of this research project consisted in reviewing existing literature on the subject. The literature review found that social protection programmes often improved social cohesion, as reported by programme beneficiaries, including **more trust, cooperation for the common good, involvement in local associations, and a greater sense of inclusive identity.** The sense of fairness and legitimacy of programmes as perceived by those *not* selected varies by context, with some contexts reporting high rates of legitimacy and others reporting lower rates. Finally, the introduction of programmes where some community members are selected to receive benefits while others are not, may result in social conflicts and tensions among community members, and the role of pre-existing contextual factors is important to study further. Key gaps in the current evidence base are that first, there is a lack of large-scale rigorous studies reporting on social cohesion impacts for non-beneficiaries of social protection programmes. While qualitative studies typically

capture the experiences of both non-beneficiaries and beneficiaries, their study sites and sample sizes are much smaller and not necessarily representative of the full programme. Second, most evidence exists around horizontal within-

community social cohesion. There is a gap in the evidence base on how social protection impacts social cohesion between different communities or out-groups and between citizens and State (vertical social cohesion). Read the full [evidence review](#).⁶

Showcasing Niger and the twin-track approach World Bank Fragility Forum 2024

At the [World Bank Fragility Forum 2024](#) held in March, WFP and UNICEF presented on the innovative [twin-track approach](#) and how it has been used in **Niger** to deliver timely and shock-responsive cash transfers. Under the theme '*Adapting and Innovating in a Volatile World*,' the Forum allowed development, humanitarian, government, civil society, private sector, and security actors, among others, who work on fragility, conflict, and violence to exchange experiences of developmental interventions in fragile contexts.

As part of the Fragility Forum [Partners Day](#), a UNICEF-WFP co-hosted side event heard from Damien Vaquier, WFP Head of Programme, Niger, and from Paul Quarles van Ufford, UNICEF Regional Social Policy Adviser, West and Central Africa. They presented key lessons learned from the operationalization of the twin-track approach in Niger, with replicable lessons for other fragile settings, in the Sahel and beyond. Other speakers, including from the World Bank, UNICEF, and the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ), touched on the value of partnerships and close coordination, including with the World Bank's [SASPP](#).

Learning from the Sahel at Forum on Social Protection in Fragility and Conflict

A [global conference on social protection in fragility and conflict](#) was held in Rome in October 2024. Its aim was to strengthen action on social protection in situations of acute, rapid onset and protracted conflicts, recognizing social protection as an essential component of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus. WFP, UNICEF and World Bank jointly brought in experiences and lessons from the Sahel, to jointly make the case for increased investments in social protection in fragile contexts, share learnings from the twin-track as a relevant approach to support delivery of social protection in these contexts and promote coordination to strengthen systems.

Lessons from the Sahel greatly enriched the dialogue during the event, and lessons and principles derived from the conference also provide valuable insights to further support social protection in the region. Read the full Forum report [here](#).⁷

Continuous dialogue and partnership building are crucial to implement holistic social protection solutions in fragile contexts.

- ◇ The partnership between WFP, UNICEF, and the World Bank has been a prime example of how collaboration can lead to impactful outcomes, combining resources and expertise, pursuing complementary workplans, and aligning visions for the country and the region.
- ◇ The twin-track approach as an entry point to expand collaboration with other organizations delivering lean season cash transfers, to promote a common delivery framework that is aligned to a national programme.

Learning from Pakistan's flagship social protection programme

COLLABORATION BETWEEN WFP, UNICEF AND THE WORLD BANK TO ALIGN STRATEGIES IN FRAGILE SETTINGS

WFP and the World Bank jointly facilitated a [South-South exchange visit](#) between the Governments of [Burkina Faso](#), [Mali](#), and [Niger](#),⁸ and [Pakistan](#) in November 2024. The visiting delegation was composed of five high-level officials, including two ministers. Three WFP Country Directors, as well as regional staff from the WFP Regional Bureau for Western Africa and the World Bank, joined the visit, a testament to the growing importance of social protection in the Sahel region. The knowledge exchange aimed at learning from Pakistan's flagship social protection programme—[Benazir Income Support Programme](#)—and inspiring action back in the central Sahel, where social protection has continued to gather momentum.

The series of lessons learnt from Pakistan in building an efficient, resilient and inclusive social protection systems were inspiring for the visiting delegation, with [Burkina Faso](#) and [Mali](#) already

aiming to replicate elements of the Pakistani social protection system and aiming to make promising strides ahead. The delegation was impressed by Pakistan's commitment to social protection and its efforts to build a resilient and inclusive system, and the constant political will to expand and improve the Benazir Income Support Programme to provide opportunities for the most vulnerable and invest in the human capital of future generations. The delegation was also inspired by the programme's journey. Resilient and inclusive social programmes must be supported by efficient and robust delivery systems, which are key to strengthening transparency and accountability.



Joint Retreat on Social Protection in the Sahel

OUTCOMES FROM THE RETREAT, EMPHASIZING PARTNERSHIPS FOR RESILIENCE IN THE SAHEL

The [2024 Joint Retreat on Social Protection in the Sahel](#) convened in Dakar last April the respective social protection teams and other team members from each of the WFP and UNICEF country offices of the UNICEF-WFP Joint Project '*Responding to COVID-19 Pandemic through social protection systems in the Sahel: Responding to the socioeconomic impacts of multiple shocks*' ([Sahel SP-JP](#)).

The joint retreat also welcomed World Bank team members representing the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program ([SASPP](#)). They were joined by WFP and UNICEF regional team leads working on, among other topics, gender, conflict, analysis, cash-based transfers, and resilience.

The retreat was held at a pivotal moment for the Sahel SP-JP, as activities recently expanded to [Burkina Faso](#) and [Chad](#) in December 2023, joining [Mali](#), [Mauritania](#), and [Niger](#).

The Sahel SP-JP's resource partner—the German development cooperation (BMZ/KfW)—had also indicated support for a subsequent new phase, one that would allow for a repositioning and reorientation of key activities and overall focus for strengthening social protection systems in the Sahel (slated to begin in 2025 through 2028 across the five countries).

The weeklong gathering not only helped build a common vision across countries, but it also allowed for the formulation of a coherent strategic focus, including [enhanced gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive measures](#) for the new phase of the Sahel SP-JP.

Importantly, the joint retreat was an opportunity to build on the shared vision and partnership between UNICEF, WFP, and the World Bank for social protection in the Sahel, ensuring stronger alignment with the World Bank and the [SASPP](#).



Joint retreat key takeaways

Leveraging a twin-track approach to delivering shock-responsive social protection

- ◇ Where vulnerability is deeply rooted and is chronic in nature, a shock-responsive approach to social protection starts with prioritizing regular national safety net programmes and expanding their coverage to optimize resilience building and social cohesion over time.
- ◇ There is an urgent and at-scale need for domestic and external finance to increase social protection coverage and ensure its ability to respond to multiple shocks.
- ◇ The twin-track approach can be leveraged to scale up coverage and strengthen national delivery mechanisms. It can help guide the expansion and improvement of social safety net programmes, including their agility, or responsiveness, to shocks, including in fragile settings.
- ◇ The twin-track approach must be considered as a continuum of delivery options, each one offering opportunities to continue developing government capacities. Shifting delivery from one track to the other can be progressive, not binary.
- ◇ Amidst competing priorities, prevailing myths, and negative perceptions on social protection and social cash transfers, social mobilization and advocacy efforts are key.

Expanding social protection in the Sahel is key to rethinking the lean season response

- ◇ Social protection is key to long-term resilience building that, together with other support mechanisms, can better prepare the most vulnerable to face both cyclical and non-cyclical shocks.
- ◇ Minimum and regular social safety net coverage helps diminish needs over time.
- ◇ Flexible programmes and delivery tools and linkages with disaster risk financing can improve planning and delivery of response to large, covariate shocks.
- ◇ A lack of institutionalized social protection programmes and budgetary allocations may lock countries into costly and unsustainable cycles of emergency-only response.
- ◇ There is a need to better understand the relationship between social protection and social cohesion; it reflects a strong investment case for social protection.
- ◇ In a context characterized by deep gender disparities, social protection systems must consider needs based on gender, have embedded designs that address those specific needs, and, where possible, contribute to tackling harmful gender norms.

Support to ECOWAS leadership in promoting social protection expansion and reforms

EFFORTS TO IMPROVE COORDINATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN ECOWAS MEMBER STATES

Last November 2023, the [ECOWAS Social Protection Framework](#) and its Operational Plan were validated by social protection experts and ministers in charge of social protection in the ECOWAS region. WFP, together with UNICEF, FAO, UNFPA, and the World Bank, have been supporting the framework's elaboration, together with its operational plan.

The framework outlines steps forward to design and implement social protection programmes, especially by addressing financing needs and mechanisms, identifying coverage gaps, and fostering coordination. Looking to its implementation, ECOWAS requested UN partners' support in delivering a [TRANSFORM 5-day learning package](#)⁹ last September for ECOWAS officials, with the support of WFP, UNICEF, ILO and FAO.

The training was delivered to [21 ECOWAS officials](#) spanning social policy, disaster risk reduction, and humanitarian and emergency response sectors, among others.

They received modules on social protection programme administration and coordination and heard of the importance of working towards [social protection floors](#) by integrating key social protection system blocks (legal frameworks, governance mechanisms, coordination bodies,

financing structures, and monitoring and information systems). The training was part of a continued effort to leverage opportunities and knowledge networks to develop leadership skills among social protection communities and share change management tools for policy practitioners.

ILO Academy on Social Security 2024

Through the Sahel SP-JP, WFP and UNICEF supported the attendance of government representatives from [Burkina Faso](#), [Mauritania](#), and [Niger](#) to the [2024 Academy on Social Security](#) organized by the International Training Center of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Turin, Italy. The flagship training on social protection welcomed 45 participants from all continents, offering them comprehensive training that provides the core expertise and skills for the analysis and design of social protection systems.

Participants were presented with the latest evidence and discussed global trends and best practices, including the extension of coverage and building of social protection floors. Improving programme design and management and the financing of social protection was also discussed, including sharing of monitoring and costing and fiscal space analyses tools. Fostering social dialogue around social protection as a human right also featured high on the curriculum, including in contexts where social protection is a key inroad for improved food security and poverty reduction.

On the sidelines of the academy, the ILO flagship [World Social Protection Report 2024-2026](#)¹⁰ was launched.

Overview of key publications



Delivering shock-responsive social protection in the Sahel:

Activating the twin-track approach in the face of political disruptions (Lessons from Niger)

The July 2023 *coup d'état* in Niger led to institutional disruptions and international sanctions, underlining the importance of a dynamic social protection delivery system that can continue to reach the most vulnerable, even in times of political instability. A twin-track approach to social cash transfer delivery enabled regular, continued assistance, despite temporary disruptions to government programmes and systems.

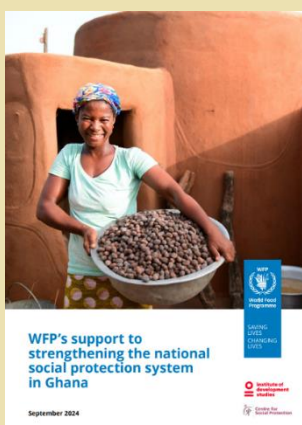
Available in [English](#).

How does social protection impact social cohesion in the Sahel? A review of existing evidence and gaps

Social protection programmes boost consumption, productivity, and resilience to climate change, contribute to enhanced health and education outcomes, and yield positive impacts on local economies. Programmes addressing poverty and vulnerability, such as social protection interventions, have the potential to strengthen social cohesion.

Untangling this relationship is essential to maximize their positive impacts and prevent potential unintended detrimental dynamics.

Available in [English](#).

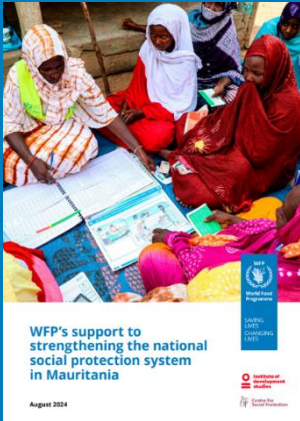


WFP's support to strengthening the national social protection

system in Ghana: A joint case study with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

The case study highlights WFP's multifaceted support in institutionalizing the national school feeding programme, by informing national legislative efforts, improving the nutritional value of school meals, and integrating smallholder farmers into the supply chain.

Available in [English](#).



WFP's support to strengthening the national social protection system in Mauritania: A joint case study with the Institute of Development Studies IDS

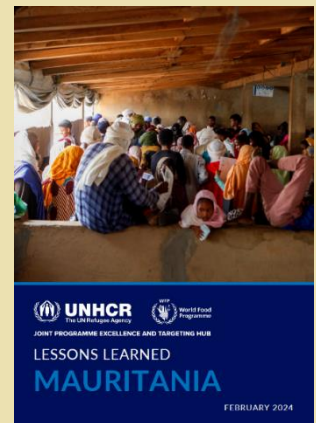
This case study includes insights into WFP's support to strengthen the national Social Registry in collaboration with the World Bank and the government, establishing it as the primary tool for the initial identification of social assistance programme beneficiaries by over 15 operational actors present in Mauritania.

Available in [English](#).

Supporting Malian refugees in Mauritania: Lessons learned from the UNHCR-WFP Joint Program Excellence and Targeting Hub

This compendium captures learnings from WFP and UNHCR's work supporting Malian refugees in Mauritania. It explores collaborative action in terms of meeting needs (through the provision of humanitarian assistance), responding to shifting needs (through refugee inclusion in national social protection systems), and reducing needs (through fostering their self-reliance).

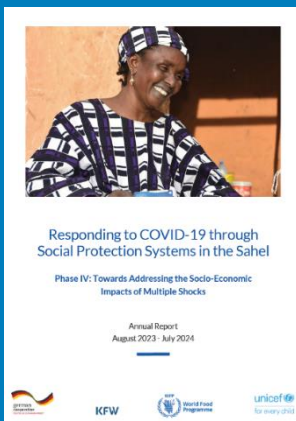
Available in [English](#).



Sahel Social Protection Joint Project (UNICEF-WFP): Annual report (August 2023—July 2024)

Since August 2020, the Joint Project has supported the Governments of Mali, Mauritania, and Niger in responding to shocks and strengthening national capacities to develop more shock-responsive and nutrition- and child-sensitive social protection systems. Building on this progress and growing emphasis on social protection in the region, the Joint Project expanded to include Burkina Faso and Chad in January 2024.

Available in [English](#).





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Footnotes

- 1 UNICEF and WFP. 2023. *All the right tracks. Delivering shock responsive social protection: lessons from the COVID-19 response*.
- 2 WFP. 2023. *Regional Bureau for Western Africa: Social Protection 2023—Year in Focus (newsletter)*.
- 3 Coudouel, Fuselli, and Saidi. 2023. *Stress testing adaptive social protection systems in the Sahel*. Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program.
- 4 Coudouel, Ocampo and Quarles van Ufford. (2024). *Fragile contexts, strong partnership: supporting adaptive social protection in the Sahel*. Development for Peace Blog Series (World Bank).
- 5 Coudouel, Ocampo and Quarles van Ufford. (2024). *The food security and nutrition challenge: what role for social protection in the Sahel?* In "Overcoming food security and nutrition roadblocks in social protection" (IPCid, Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (Ipea).
- 6 Sharma and Menke. 2024. *How does social protection impact social cohesion in the Sahel? A review of existing evidence and gaps*. Joint UNICEF-WB-WFP Research Project—Exploring the impacts of social protection on social cohesion in the Sahel.
- 7 2024. *Forum on social protection in fragility and conflict: Building and protecting social protection systems through the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus*. Forum Report.
- 8 The Niger delegation participated online.
- 9 TRANSFORM is an innovative capacity-building programme on the administration of national social protection floors. Since its inception in 2015, TRANSFORM has been implemented by regional experts across the African region in more than 20 countries.
- 10 ILO. 2024. *World Social Protection Report 2024-26—Universal social protection for climate action and a just transition*.

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