



World Food Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

WFP EVALUATION

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

Prioritization

In 2023, WFP received USD8.3 billion against its approved needs-based plan of USD22.8 billion, leaving the organization with its highest-ever recorded funding shortfall of 64 percent.

As humanitarian needs rise and resources shrink, WFP country offices are increasingly forced to prioritize, raising interest from WFP stakeholders about the criteria and strategies that drive prioritization decisions during funding shortfalls.

Within WFP, prioritization is defined as ensuring, “that the most vulnerable people within the targeted population are prioritized for assistance” (WFP, 2021. *Targeting and prioritization operational guidance note*). It occurs at two levels:

- **Strategic:** Resourcing decisions on the prioritization of focus areas, strategic objectives and activities, some driven by donor contributions’ earmarking.
- **Operational:** Country offices’ prioritization of reaching the most vulnerable populations with available resources, mainly occurring within the same activity. This may involve focusing on certain populations, the duration and timing of assistance, or the quantity and quality of WFP rations and/or transfer values.

Commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation

7 KEY MESSAGES

1 Without adequate resources, WFP’s extremely constrained operational environment requires making difficult decisions and managing trade-offs to deliver on its dual mandate.

Based on the countries covered in this summary, rising beneficiary numbers (by 272 percent between 2018 and 2022) and a growing funding gap made it increasingly difficult for WFP to reach all people in need with available resources. Financial requirements increased by 67 percent between 2019 and 2022. Despite a growth in available resources, the annual gap between allocated resources and estimated needs rose from 28 percent in 2019 to 34 percent in 2022, with a peak at 44 percent in 2021. Important fluctuations are noted in the share of needs that were not met with allocated contributions year on year, and trends are different for each focus area and even appear to be inverted between crisis response and root causes. Latest available trends show resilience and root causes to be most affected by the growing gap in resource allocation.

This is clear both at strategic and operational levels. Strategically, more funding is directed towards crisis response than resilience and root causes, with a smaller funding gap for crisis response. Operationally, country offices are grappling with the trade-offs between maintaining breadth of coverage versus safeguarding the depth of their assistance to vulnerable populations.

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The need to prioritize has, in the case of reviewed evaluations, affected large-sized WFP operations more than small and medium-sized operations. Regardless of an emphasis on saving lives or changing lives, all operations had to either prioritize beneficiary caseloads or reduce assistance volumes, although it was slightly more common in saving lives -type operations.

2 In addition to funding gaps driving WFP's need to further prioritize assistance, changes in context, typically those driving increased humanitarian needs and food insecurity frequently underpinned reprioritization decisions.

This was most evident during COVID-19, when WFP operations rapidly adjusted to changing priorities and ways of working, aided in part by the flexibility of country strategic plans. Beyond the pandemic, climate related shocks, fluctuating food and energy prices, and increased population displacement continuously urged WFP to reprioritize in response to acute humanitarian needs.

Earmarking of funds also contributed to this trend, further constraining WFP's prioritization efforts on resilience and root causes. Nutrition was particularly hindered by donor earmarking, which some country offices mitigated by mainstreaming nutrition across all intervention areas. However, funding constraints nevertheless reduced the scope and strategic nature of WFP's engagement in this area.

3 WFP has approached prioritization at an operational level in multiple ways.

- Reduced beneficiary caseloads: Country offices primarily shifted from blanket or status-based targeting to vulnerability-based targeting, as a way of identifying those most in need of WFP emergency assistance and reprioritizing available resources to maintain acceptable coverage. This approach was particularly notable when WFP was working with protracted caseloads during an escalation of needs combined with funding shortages.
- Reduced quantity and quality of rations and/or the value of cash transfers: either to maintain existing caseloads or to accommodate an increase in numbers.
- Shorter duration of support was reported in a few countries as a way of prioritizing within existing budgets.

4 Across the range of approaches used, WFP tends to prioritize breadth over depth in life-saving operations.

This was a trend noted to preserve or extend beneficiary reach with a reduced level of assistance. While limited, there were also good examples of WFP maximizing its broad agenda across the humanitarian and development spheres by switching beneficiaries between activities to capitalize on available funding or by mainstreaming poorly funded nutrition activities in other strategic outcomes.

5 The impact of prioritization decisions on beneficiaries is not consistently well evidenced.

Only a few evaluations connected the dots by documenting the effect of prioritization decisions on beneficiaries. The limited evidence available show that funding shortfalls and subsequent reprioritization of existing resources resulted in negative food and nutrition security outcomes for affected populations.

6 Prioritization decisions need to be better communicated, to avoid risk of creating tensions.

As a side effect of prioritization, when resulting retargeting decisions were not appropriately communicated to or consulted with affected populations, some evaluations noted confusion, at times driving complaints and tensions within communities or with cooperating partners.

In the same line, shifts in WFP's strategic priorities may impact on important relationships with governments, though only one evaluation highlighted a negative impact on such relations due to insufficiently explaining strategic reprioritization.

7 Recommendations on prioritization within country strategic plans included taking steps to improve the use of data and analysis to inform prioritization and the need for stronger messaging and communication of prioritization decisions, especially where the organization was transitioning its focus and role.

BREADTH OF EVIDENCE

This summary of evaluation evidence brings together findings from 42 evaluations commissioned by WFP, covering the period 2017-2023. It aims at shedding light on trends and significant differences of approaches across countries and contexts regarding prioritization: categorizing the main drivers of WFP's prioritization processes, mapping different prioritization approaches and documenting the strategic and operational effects from such decisions.

The summary has global coverage, covering WFP interventions in 41 different countries. Out of the reviewed universe, most were country strategic plan evaluations, and one was a corporate emergency evaluation; all rated 'satisfactory' or above by WFP's external Post-hoc Quality Assessment (PHQA).

This summary applied the approach and methods set out in WFP's technical note on summaries of evaluation evidence, namely:

- A universe of 42 WFP independent evaluations was collected, all including evidence on prioritization.
- Evidence was systematically extracted from the evaluations according to key lines of inquiry identified at the framing stage.
- Evidence was analyzed and clustered around analytical themes, with key patterns and findings identified.
- The resulting report was drafted and commented upon by stakeholders, being finalised in January 2025.



The designations employed and the presentation of material in the map does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever of WFP concerning the legal or constitutional status of any country, territory or sea area, or concerning the delimitation of frontiers.

ANNEX ■ LIST OF EVALUATIONS CONSULTED

- [Evaluation of Rwanda WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#)
- [Évaluation de la réponse d'urgence du PAM aux crises prolongées au Sahel et dans d'autres pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest et centrale 2018-2023](#)
- [Evaluation of Syrian Arab Republic WFP Transitional and Interim Country Strategic Plans 2018-2025](#)
- [Evaluation of the Interim Country Strategic Plan in Algeria \(2019-2022\)](#)
- [Evaluation of Bhutan WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2019-2023](#)
- [Evaluation of Cambodia WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2019-2023](#)
- [Evaluation of Dominican Republic WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2019-2023](#)
- [Évaluation du plan stratégique de pays du PAM pour Haïti, 2018-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of Namibia WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2017-2023](#)
- [Evaluation of Nepal WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2019-2023](#)
- [Evaluation of Zambia WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2019-2023](#)
- [Evaluación del Plan Estratégico para el País del PMA en el Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia 2018-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of Chad WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#)
- [Ecuador: an Evaluation of WFP's Strategic Plan \(2017-2021\)](#)
- [Evaluation of India WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of the Kyrgyz Republic WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of Pakistan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018 - 2022](#)
- [Evaluation of State of Palestine WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#)
- [Evaluación de Plan Estratégico País de PMA Peru 2018-2022](#)
- [Évaluation du plan stratégique de pays du PAM pour Sénégal, 2018-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of Sudan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of Tajikistan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2024](#)
- [Evaluación del plan estratégico para El Salvador \(2017-2022\)](#)
- [The Gambia WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2021](#)
- [Evaluación de Honduras Plan Estratégico País de PMA 2018-2021](#)
- [Evaluation of Lao People's Democratic Republic WFP Country Strategic Plan \(2017-2021\)](#)
- [Lebanon WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#)
- [Evaluation of Mozambique WFP Country Strategic Plan 2017-2021](#)
- [Republic of Zimbabwe: An evaluation of WFP Country Strategic Plan \(2017-2020\)](#)
- [Evaluation of the WFP Country Strategic Plan in Sri Lanka 2018-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of Benin WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#)
- [Évaluation du plan stratégique de pays du PAM Burkina Faso 2018 - 2022](#)
- [Evaluation of Egypt WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2018-2023](#)
- [Evaluation of Ghana WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2019-2023](#)
- [Evaluation of Kenya WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2018-2023](#)
- [Evaluation of Madagascar WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2019-2023](#)
- [Evaluation of Malawi WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2019-2023](#)
- [Evaluation of Philippines WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2018-2023](#)
- [Évaluation du Plan Stratégique Pays provisoire du PAM en République centrafricaine \(2018-2022\)](#)
- [Evaluation of Jordan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2020-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of Nigeria WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#)
- [Evaluation of South Sudan WFP Interim Country Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#)


WFP EVALUATION

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