



Evaluation of WFP Country Strategic Plan in Armenia (2019–2025)

Context

Armenia is an upper middle-income country, which in recent years had to face a volatile economic growth driven by multiple shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic and border conflicts in the Karabakh region that escalated between September and November 2020 and in 2022. These instabilities led to internal displacements and an influx of over 100,000 refugees from Karabakh in 2023.

This context, compounded by the effects of trade restrictions and high food inflation rates connected to the war in Ukraine, negatively impacted Armenian households' food security: 30 percent were reported as food insecure in the period December 2022 – January 2023, with rural areas most affected. Despite overall progress on the nutrition situation, anaemia and obesity levels among women have been higher than regional averages. In 2024, Armenia ranked 64th out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index. Agriculture, mainly small-scale, is the primary source of economic activity in rural areas. School enrolment and literacy rates are generally high.

Subject and focus of the evaluation

The country strategic plan (CSP) for Armenia for 2019–2025 intended to continue the ongoing shift from directly implementing school feeding activities to strengthening national capacities of the Government and partners. It was originally designed for the period from July 2019 to June 2024 with two Strategic Outcomes focused on direct assistance to schools, and country capacity strengthening (CCS) in the areas of school feeding, food and nutrition security and emergency preparedness.

Aligned to context changes, it was expanded through a series of budget revisions, extending up to 2025, and increasing from a Needs-Based Plan of USD 27.9 million to USD 84.2 million. Two Strategic Outcomes were added to provide on-demand service, livelihood recovery for crisis affected populations, support to national food systems and social protection systems, and food value chain development.

As of July 2024, the CSP was funded at 54.6 percent. The Russian Federation was the largest funding source, followed by flexible funding, the European Commission, the United States and France.

Objectives and users of the evaluation

The evaluation of the CSP serves both accountability and learning purposes and informs the design of the next CSP. It was conducted between March 2024 and February 2025 and covers a five-year period of CSP implementation (July 2019 – July 2024). The Transitional Interim CSP from 2018–2019 is considered with respect to design and preparation of the current CSP.

The intended users of the evaluation are the WFP country office in Armenia, the Middle East, Northern Africa, and Eastern Europe Regional Office, technical divisions at headquarters in Rome, the WFP Executive Board, the Government of Republic of Armenia, WFP partners and beneficiaries in Armenia.

Key evaluation findings

Relevance, strategic positioning and internal coherence

The CSP design and implementation was well aligned with needs of the vulnerable people in Armenia and with government priorities. Focus on the handover of school feeding programme and broader country capacity strengthening support on strategies, policies and programmes related to food security, malnutrition and emergency preparedness were appropriate.

WFP was well positioned for its country capacity strengthening support and was government's preferred partner at central and local level.

Even though the original CSP design was coherent, the various expansions led to some programmatic misalignment. The structure also did not reflect the interlinkages between strategic outcomes even when some activities were integrated in implementation.

Effectiveness and sustainability

Most activities under the CSP showed high levels of achievement, the most notable being the transfer of the school feeding programme to the Government, with the accompanying national policy framework. WFP's long-term coordination and alignment with government priorities buttressed this success, leading to a clear commitment from the government to funding and implementing the national school feeding programme. The transformative school feeding model contains various innovative components, such as school-based agriculture and horticulture, the installation of solar panels and other energy-saving measures, and the provision of kitchen equipment. It already serves as a reference point for other countries, but further investments are needed to ensure sustainability.

Important contributions were made to National Food Systems at strategic level including the National Food Security Strategy and Action Plan. WFP's support to food value chains, agriculture and renewable energy has enhanced agricultural productivity for participating farmers. Nonetheless, the scale of implementation was small, and less attention was directed to improving the corresponding market systems, which limited sustainability.

Strengthening the national social protection system at institutional and policy levels has led to positive outcomes, notably paving the way for development of a national Strategy of Labour and Social Protection. The piloting of innovative food card modality was successful and there is intention for full roll out. The evaluation noted continued need for strengthening capacities, legal frameworks and coordination mechanisms across social workers at sub-national and community levels.

Emergency assistance to refugees from Karabakh and to internally displaced persons through cash for work programming was effective in improving food security and creating short-term employment. WFP also supported border communities with productive investments for livelihood recovery, complementary to social protection and psychosocial support activities by cooperating partners.

Contribution to cross-cutting dimensions

Cross-cutting dimensions have been integrated well in programming and reporting, but there is room for improved inclusion of women and people living with disabilities, and monitoring of differential effects on these groups. Nutrition integration was demonstrated in programming, but more attention is needed to address long-term nutrition challenges in Armenia. Attention to the Humanitarian-Development nexus was insufficient during implementation. The technical assistance provided to the government on shock responsive social protection systems linked to the emergency response was noted as a positive nexus related element, though consistent approaches are needed.

Funding and efficiency in CSP implementation

The CSP implementation has been timely, with interventions following intended timeframes and swift responses to newly emerging needs (COVID-19, Karabakh and border crisis).

The quality and commitment of WFP staff members is widely recognised, though some competency gaps restrain effective support to food value chain development, SBC, M&E and the humanitarian-development nexus.

The CSP did not experience major funding gaps except for food value chain related activities with a large part of the portfolio funded by a single donor, posing continuity risks.

The CSP was supported by well-developed partnerships with government at national and sub national levels, a strong network of cooperating partners and adequate coordination in UN working groups. There is room for more strategic and joined-up work with partners.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Develop a clearer CSP structure which articulates interconnectedness of CCS with direct assistance and is accompanied by an adequate log frame, monitoring system and required staffing capacities and competency.

Recommendation 2. Continued focus on capacity strengthening to foster smooth handover to the government at national level, with adequate accompaniment at provincial and community level, and on capacity development support to nongovernmental bodies recipient of WFP investments.

Recommendation 3. Strengthen the mainstreaming of cross-cutting priorities in the CSP while increasing specific tailored actions for inclusion of women and other vulnerable people and increased investments in social and behaviour change approaches.

Recommendation 4. Building on the WFP comparative advantage in humanitarian assistance, further develop a humanitarian-development nexus approach for interventions at individuals and community level, with the goal of integrating this approach in government systems.

Recommendation 5. Strengthen existing and develop new strategic and operational partnerships including joint UN coordination and programming; and an effective implementing partner network at the field level.