WFP EVALUATION

Evaluation of WFP's Cash Based Transfers and Social Protection Activities in Transitioning Emergency Assistance to National Systems and Preparing for a Responsible Exit in Moldova: March 2022 to August 2025

Decentralized evaluation report

WFP Moldova

World Food Programme

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Acknowledgements

Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Evaluation Features

1.	This decentralised evaluation, commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP) Moldova Country Office (CO), was conducted between May and October 2025. It serves the dual purpose of accountability and learning and was designed to contribute to the preparation for a responsible exit of WFP from Moldova and distil learnings for WFP and external stakeholders.

2.	The evaluation spans the period from the establishment of the WFP presence in Moldova in March 2022 through to August 2025. This covers three WFP plans; the WFP Limited Emergency Operation (LEO) in Ukraine and refugee hosting countries, the Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan for Moldova (T-ICSP) and the Interim Country Strategic Plan for Moldova (ICSP).

3.	The intended users of the evaluation are the WFP Moldova CO, WFP regional offices, senior management and technical units at HQ, the Government of Moldova, members of the United Nations country team, and cooperating partners.

4.	The evaluation used a theory-based, mixed-methods approach drawing on documentary evidence, quantitative secondary data, direct observation, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions with assisted people. Gender and social inclusion considerations were fully integrated, and ethical standards ensured participants' dignity and confidentiality. The data collection process for this evaluation faced few limitations and the Evaluation Team (ET) have a high degree of confidence in the results.

Context

5.	Moldova experienced major shocks following the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022, receiving a large influx of Ukrainian refugees (see Figure 1)[1] — most of whom transited to other European countries. Moldova also experienced significant economic disruption which compounded already high poverty (33.6% in 2024) and food insecurity levels (24.7% in 2023).

Figure 1 Trends in Arrivals and Departures of Ukrainian Refugees in Moldova
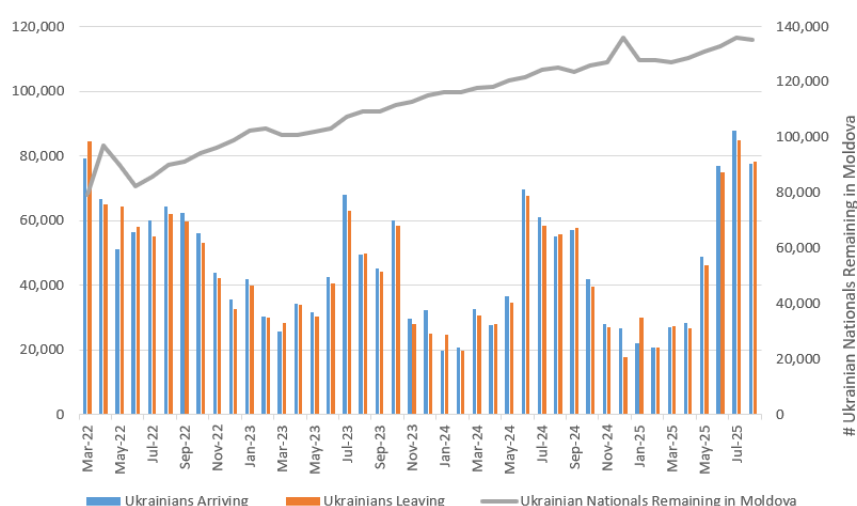
Source: UNHCR[2]

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[1] UNHCR (2025b).
[2] UNHCR (2025b)

6.   In response, the government advanced key reforms, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection's (MLSP) 2023 RESTART strategy to strengthen social protection and the approval of a refugee inclusion framework in May 2025. Over the same period, net Official Development Assistance rose sharply from USD 342 million in 2019 to USD 1.051 billion in 2023, largely from the European Union, but is projected to decline from 2025.

WFP interventions in Moldova

7.   WFP activities in Moldova commenced in February 2022 with the provision of hot meals to refugees and cash transfers to refugee hosting households (RHHs), as part of the Ukraine LEO. The T-ICSP, which commenced in September 2022, expanded the emergency response to include vulnerable Moldovans. Cash assistance was provided to vulnerable Moldovans as a top-up to the Ajutor Social cash transfer programme. The T-ICSP also committed to a responsible exit through providing technical support to the MLSP to strengthen the social protection system.

Figure 2 Timeline of WFP programme
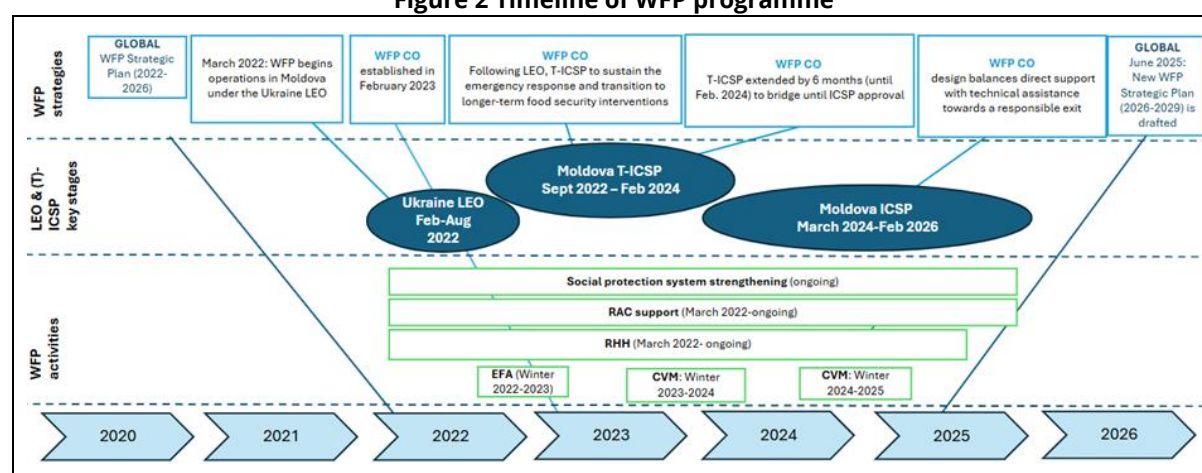
8.   The ICSP placed a stronger emphasis on building national capacity through government and UN partnerships, providing technical support to enhance the shock-responsiveness of the social protection system, advance digitalization to improve data quality and interoperability, and strengthen local social canteens.

9.   The T-ICSP and ICSP were both well-funded, with funding exceeding the implementation plan for all years.

Key findings

Relevance

10.   WFP responded appropriately to a major emergency that overlapped with pre-existing economic vulnerability and exceeded national response capacity. Support to vulnerable Moldovans was needs based and supported social cohesion. Targeting drew on assessments of refugee and Moldovan needs, although analysis of refugee-hosting households and gender-specific needs was limited, and donor priorities influenced support levels.

11.   WFP prioritised alignment with the national social protection system, building relationships and a deeper understanding of system strengths and weaknesses. This informed the design of system-strengthening activities and became increasingly relevant as humanitarian funding contracted. WFP identified a menu of offers that could be delivered within short timeframes with partners that have longer-term presence. Agreement on activities required reconciling strategic priorities and calibrating to Government interest.

Coherence

12.   Government reforms, particularly the RESTART initiative, which focused mainly on social services rather than social transfers, created a framework that aligned well with national priorities in areas such as digitalisation, assurance, and human resources. Activities most closely tied to these priorities advanced more quickly, while work outside RESTART, including efforts to strengthen shock responsiveness, progressed more slowly. Until recently, gaps in disaster risk management and refugee inclusion policies also limited broader system-strengthening efforts.

13.   Interagency cooperation was strong, with early agreements assigning UNHCR responsibility for cash assistance to refugees and WFP leading cash support for vulnerable Moldovans in coordination with other United Nations agencies. Partnerships with UNDP and UNICEF will help sustain efforts beyond the CO closure, and the creation of the Inclusion and Solutions Working Group supported the transition from humanitarian to development-focused action. Collaboration was further enabled by limited competition for resources, constructive relationships, clear government leadership, and the fact that WFP's time-bound presence posed no threat to other partners' established roles.

Efficiency

14.   WFP's Cash Based Transfer (CBT) processes were timely, secure, and accessible. The first transfers were made within one month of arrival, supported by a global agreement with Western Union. Beneficiaries reported fast, regular, and predictable payments. Accessibility improved as a switch to home deliveries by Posta Moldovei better served the elderly and people with disabilities. Safeguards against misappropriation were comprehensive. A Complaints and Feedback Mechanism (CFM) was set up, including safeguards against PSEA and GBV. Complaints were promptly addressed, although not all beneficiaries were aware of the system.

15.   WFP transfers were aligned to varying degrees with national systems for registration, targeting, transfer values, financial service providers, and verification. This improved efficiency, sustainability prospects, and national ownership, although incomplete social registries limited targeting, and aligned transfer values sometimes reduced how fully needs were met.

16.   WFP strengthened government efficiency through support to the UAHelp self-registration portal, improvements to Ajutor Social processes, and an Ajutor Social data analytics dashboard for real-time monitoring and policy support. Training for MLSP staff improved skills, capacity, and motivation.

17.   Contributions in areas including CFMs and strengthening social canteens was limited. The decentralized management of the canteens complicated the negotiation of system-strengthening support and prospects for sustainability uncertain.

18.   Institutional systems enabled an effective response. WFP rapidly mobilised short-term staff for the emergency phase, then formalised longer-term roles as focus shifted to system-strengthening and exit. Recruitment of national staff was challenging throughout. The T-ICSP bridged to a more ambitious ICSP with a clear strategic direction and formal agreements with MLSP. High turnover and reliance on short-term staff delayed progress, with key roles filled in 2024. Funding needs were met, helped by positioning on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and clear messaging on a responsible, time-bound exit. However, earmarking for refugee assistance limited flexibility and required careful budget management. Monitoring met corporate standards and post-distribution data informed adjustments. Limited documentation of system-strengthening and policy engagement constrained demonstration of strategic results and progress toward a responsible exit.

Effectiveness

19.   WFP's multipurpose cash assistance and hot meals helped refugees and Moldovans meet essential needs, improved food security, and reduced negative coping. However, there was a deterioration in coping strategies over time as inflation eroded the value of the transfer (see Figure 3). For refugees, hot meals were consistently described as regular, balanced, and nutritious. While assistance supported social stability, its contribution to fostering refugee-host community solidarity was difficult to demonstrate.

Figure 3 Coping Strategy Index (Food), refugee hosting households
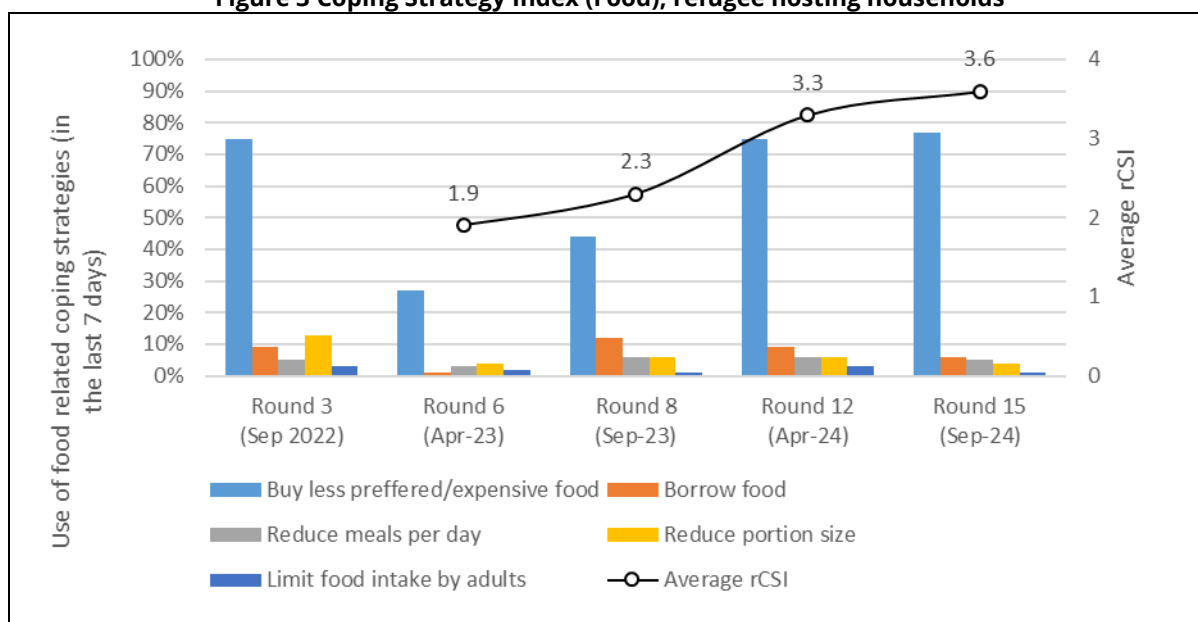
20.   UNHCR led advocacy for the overall inclusion of refugees in national systems, with WFP playing a substantive and constructive role in advancing the integration of refugees; through supporting advocacy and coordination efforts, and technical contributions such as the UAHelp registration portal. While political willingness for inclusion has increased — partly triggered by the risk of declining external funding — progress remains constrained by government fiscal limitations.

21.   WFP pursued a flexible approach to shock responsive social protection (SRSP), moving from a focus on Ajutor Social to a distinct emergency cash package centred on Ajutor Monetar. Progress included stronger partnerships. Risks remain due to incomplete legislation and uneven ownership across government and partner. While progress has been made — particularly in partnership-building — implementation risks remain due to incomplete legislation, varying levels of ownership in Government and amongst development partners.

22.   WFP strategically focused system-strengthening efforts on Ajutor Social, to serve the dual purpose of a platform for emergency response and long-term poverty reduction. Technical assistance to Ajutor Social was aligned to improved efficiency by identifying inclusion errors. However, despite evidence-based advocacy and targeted support, political resistance to expanding coverage severely limited progress, with competing government priorities and budget constraints preventing programme reform or scale-up. Legislative changes saw coverage of Ajutor Social shrink dramatically between 2021 and 2025 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Number of households under Ajutor Social per month
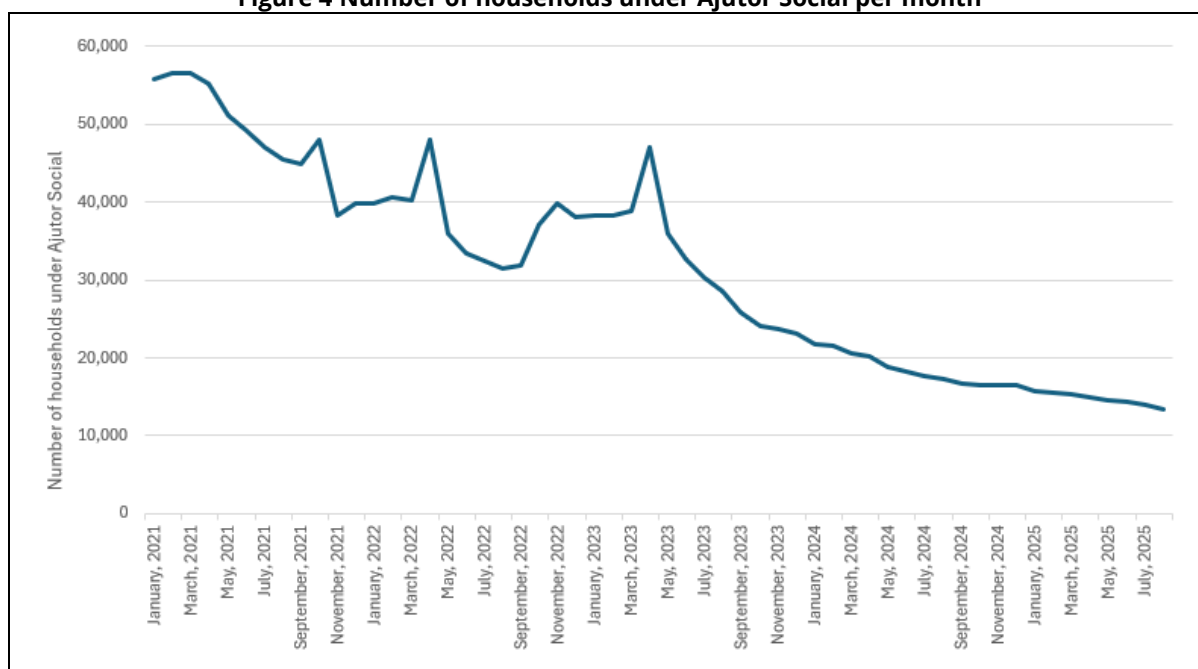
Source: Ajutor Social Dashboard

23.   Cash assistance and social protection support reached women and groups facing gendered vulnerabilities, reducing caregiving pressures and improving access to essentials. Gaps remained for marginalised groups, especially Roma families, and WFP did not form strategic partnerships with representative organisations or other UN agencies to pursue gender-transformative or empowerment-focused approaches.

24.   Moldova's upper-middle-income context, government leadership, digitalisation agenda, and donor interest enabled contributions to social protection transformation. WFP's flexibility was a comparative advantage. The limited timeframe constrained progress across the humanitarian-development nexus.

25.   WFP has taken a deliberately sustainability-focused approach to system-strengthening in Moldova by aligning investments with government priorities, designing "no regrets" deliverables with standalone value and developing post-production pathways — particularly for digital tools — to ensure long-term institutionalisation. However, the continuity of these solutions ultimately depends on government IT capacity and resourcing, which remain limited despite mitigation efforts through partnerships.

Responsible Exit

26.   WFP's presence was designed as time-bound with a commitment to responsible exit. CO conceptualised four phases with distinct programme and staffing configurations (see Figure 5). In the absence of corporate guidance on full country closure, the CO developed its own transition model, underscoring the need for institutionalised frameworks.

Figure 5 Evolution of WFP presence in Moldova

Source: Mokoro, drawing on WFP, 2025g and Naranjilla, 2025

27.   Moldova's mature institutional environment, strong government leadership and conducive policy framework enabled WFP to undertake capacity-strengthening activities throughout its engagement in Moldova, first alongside emergency delivery and then with an increasingly strong focus in the transition away from emergency response, as a credible pathway to exit. Strategic early choices, strong partnerships and humanitarian funding flexibility allowed WFP to support national systems effectively. This was supplemented by handover to other United Nations agencies and activity closure, although localization ambitions were not fully realized. Robust funding has facilitated an efficient and well-considered transition process

Lessons, conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

28.	Conclusion 1: WFP rapidly established itself as a credible actor in Moldova, delivering timely and effective assistance while strategically aligning with national systems.

29.	Conclusion 2: WFP's alignment of CBT delivery with national systems was successfully leveraged to provide meaningful and well-received contributions to strengthening MLSP cash delivery chains. These activities were well aligned with WFP's timeframe and digitalization emerged as a particularly impactful contribution. WFP lacked a clear comparative advantage in promoting gender equality and social inclusion.

30.	Conclusion 3: WFP positioned itself to support policy and programme reform, but progress on system-level changes was constrained by its short operational timeframe. Success depended heavily on government interest, and WFP was most effective when contributing flexibly to longer-term efforts led by other partners.

31.	Conclusion 4: Technical assistance alone cannot drive system-level reform; it must be paired with solutions to financial and political barriers. WFP contributed meaningfully by promoting coordination and helping link government to broader development financing.

32.	Conclusion 5: WFP's contribution to social protection system-strengthening was enabled by early strategic choices and flexible institutional systems. However, a faster transition from emergency response to longer-term engagement could have improved the depth of results.

33.	Conclusion 6: The limited refugee caseload justifies WFP's decision to exit direct operations in Moldova, and the CO's deliberate approach to a responsible transition offers valuable corporate learning.

Lessons learned

34.	Several valuable lessons emergence from the evaluation. Key amongst these were that (i) the initial operational choices and its degree of alignment with national systems have a decisive influence on WFP's strategic trajectory and shape the decision to exit (ii) an integrated refugee and host population response created a conducive environment for the inclusion of refugees in the national system, (iii) while technical assistance is a key ingredient in capacity strengthening, it must be paired with solutions to address financial and political barriers, (iv) partnerships are critical to delivering sustainable system-strengthening, and (v) adaptive planning processes and support services are essential for a responsible exit.

35.	The evaluation makes the following recommendations based on supporting conclusions and key findings:

Recommendation
Recommendation 1: In advance of the planned WFP exit from Moldova, the Country Office should focus on embedding and sustaining system-strengthening activities within national institutions and capturing key learnings to inform corporate practice.
1.1 WFP should complete all system-strengthening activities in line with the timeframe for closing the Country Office in early 2026.
1.2 In this remaining programme period the WFP Country Office should prioritise the implementation of (i) "post production" activities to ensure the successful transfer of system-strengthening activities, and (ii) support to inter-agency and Government coordination efforts to transition of refugee support from humanitarian, to development, sources of finance, whilst (iii) putting in place handover plans to the government and WFP partners.
1.3 The Country Office should prioritize knowledge management plan actions to capture key lessons from Moldova in relation to its system-strengthening work, to fill gaps in WFP corporate technical guidance.

1.4   The Country Office should develop products capturing the entry-to-exit best practice across programme and support services including development of an entry-to-exit model for WFP Country Office in similar contexts and Standard Operating Procedures for Country Office Transition and Closure.
Recommendation 2 WFP HQ should draw on the lessons from Moldova to support the delivery of the WFP Strategic Plan for 2026-2029, including Strategic Outcome 1 (Effective emergency preparedness and response) and Strategic outcome 3 (Enabled government and partner programmes).
2.1   Update Country Strategic Planning (CSP) guidance related to CSP design, particularly applicable to MIC and protracted humanitarian and displacement contexts, and key features on the rollout of programme and support services from the opening to closure of a Country Office.
2.2   Update specific tools and procedures related to the Global Footprint Review supporting Country Offices to proactively transition out of direct assistance to government systems, and, to manage a responsible exit and closure of Country Offices.
2.3   Using best practice from the Moldova CO, support Global Headquarters to strengthen areas of WFP technical guidance currently under revision or development, and to identify potential needs for clarification or new corporate guidance. To pay attention in particular to: transitioning direct assistance to social protection programmes including the use of digital technologies; management of protracted refugee caseloads; application of shock-responsive social protection to protracted displacement and crisis contexts, and; innovations in the training of Government social workforce.

1. Introduction

1.1. Evaluation features

1. This evaluation was commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP) Moldova Country Office. The evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR) can be found in Annex 1.

2. The purpose this evaluation is threefold:[3]

- To prepare for and guide the responsible exit of WFP from Moldova and handover its activities to other United Nations agencies and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

- To provide learning for WFP operations around the world on how WFP cash assistance and capacity strengthening[4] for social protection complements and transitions to technical assistance and inclusion efforts in government social assistance programmes.

- To provide WFP with evidence to feed into international, regional and national decision-making for addressing policy, programming and funding issues related to protracted humanitarian emergencies and operating social protection in fragile, conflict affected and violent contexts.

3. This evaluation serves the dual and mutually reinforcing objectives of accountability and learning, but with an emphasis on learning, as stated in the ToR:

- Accountability: Assess the performance and results of WFP's capacity strengthening for social protection and CBT in Moldova, including its ability to meet the needs of male and female refugees, host populations and Moldovans affected by the war.

- Learning: Provide evidence and lessons learned on the use of social protection systems to respond to a refugee crisis in a middle-income country with no previous presence of WFP. The evaluation will examine how the national social protection system was a vehicle for WFP to deliver direct assistance (CBT) as well as capacity strengthening.

4. The evaluation spans the period from the establishment of the WFP presence in Moldova in March 2022 through to August 2025, covering relevant activities under three WFP plans; the WFP Limited Emergency Operation (LEO) in Ukraine and refugee hosting countries (March 2022 to August 2022), the Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan for Moldova (T-ICSP) (September 2022 and extended to February 2024) and the Interim Country Strategic Plan for Moldova (ICSP) (March 2024 to February 2026). As identified in the ToR the evaluation will focus on the Strategic Outcome 2 (SO2) in the T-ICSP and ICSP (to national enhanced social protection capacities), but includes activities under the Strategic Outcome (SO1) in the LEO, T-ICSP and ICSP (meeting the needs of crisis-affected populations) that have leveraged national systems and provided an entry point for WFP engagement in the social protection space.

5. The primary intended user of the evaluation is the WFP Moldova Country Office (CO), to inform future planning and programming. The evaluation will also support learning on system-strengthening by WFP Middle East, Northern Africa, and Eastern Europe Regional Office in Cairo (MENAEERO), other WFP Regional Offices, Headquarters (HQ), technical units and senior management. Other users include the Government of Moldova (in particular the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP), civil society institutions and academia, donors, and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Moldova.

6. Data collection for the evaluation took place in August 2025 and included the review and analysis of secondary data, as well as primary data collection during a two-week mission in Moldova. The evaluation

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[3] See Summary ToR in Annex 1

[4] Throughout the findings, conclusions and recommendations, the Evaluation Team have replaced capacity strengthening with system-strengthening to improve clarity about WFP activities.

was conducted by a team of consultants from Mokoro Ltd., combining evaluation expertise with in-depth knowledge of social protection systems and humanitarian response, as well as language capabilities in Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian.

1.2. Context[5]

1.2.1. Poverty and food security

7. The Republic of Moldova is an upper-middle income[6] country with a resident population of 2.4 million and a large diaspora, with approximately 0.86 million Moldovans living abroad.[7] It is an upper-middle income country, that made good progress in reducing poverty from 29.5 percent in 2014 to 23.0 percent in 2018.[8] However, following the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine the absolute poverty rate in 2024 rose to 33.6 percent, with significant disparities between rural (42.9 percent) and urban (21.6 percent) populations.[9] Moreover, 15.2 percent of the population live in extreme poverty. Poverty rates are highest in households that depend on agriculture, in the south and among pensioners.[10] Poverty rates amongst male- (33.1 percent) and female-headed households (34.7 percent) are similar.[11]

8. The high underlying poverty rates heightened vulnerability to the war - related economic shocks. Moldova ranked 26 out of 127 countries in the Global Hunger Index in 2024.[12] The prevalence of severe and moderate food insecurity was estimated to have increased from 19.3 percent in 2016 to 24.7 percent in 2023 and remains one of the highest in Europe.[13] This rate has been consistently higher for females, at 28.7 percent versus 20.8 percent for males in 2023. Food access, rather than food availability, is the main challenge to food security. In 2024, almost 40 percent of household expenditures were estimated to go on food (about three times higher than the European Union (EU) average),[14] followed by 17 percent for housing, water, electricity and gas.

9. Considerable progress has been made in recent years to advance gender equality. In 2025, the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index positioned Moldova as 7th out of 146 countries (in 2024 – 13th) and 6th in Europe. However, women are less involved in income-generating activities than men and women aged 18 and over are more dependent on social assistance compared to men.[15] Moldova's legal framework for gender equality is anchored in its ratification of international instruments such as United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women.

10. A World Bank analysis highlights Moldova's high exposure to climate-related and natural hazards such as droughts, floods, and earthquakes, noting these risks disproportionately affect vulnerable populations and the economy. The report emphasizes the need for investing in resilience to mitigate damage, improve productivity, protect livelihoods, and adapt to climate change through strategies like strengthened disaster risk management and increased resilience.[16]

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[5] The context analysis presented includes an intersectional analysis of the social groups of concern in line with the United Nations Sector Wide Approach (UN SWAp) Criterion 3a.

[6] World Bank (2025).

[7] Republic of Moldova National Bureau of Statistics. (2024). Population and Housing Census.

[8] UN Moldova (2020)

[9] The absolute poverty rate is based on minimum decent household expenditure, which in 2024 was 3,493.3 Moldovan lei/person.

[10] Republic of Moldova National Bureau of Statistics. (2024). Population and Housing Census.

[11] Moldova National Bureau of Statistics (2025a)

[12] Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe (2024).

[13] FAOSTAT (2024).

[14] Government of the Republic of Moldova (2022).

[15] Moldova National Bureau of Statistics (2025c).

[16] World Bank (2021).

1.2.2.   Impact of Ukrainian crisis on Moldova

11.   Following the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022, Moldova received a large influx of Ukrainian refugees. As of March 2025, more than 1.07 million Ukrainian refugees had entered Moldova, a majority of whom were transiting to Europe. 135,000 refugees were estimated to be in Moldova in August 2025 (see Figure 6).[17] Women and children comprise 81 percent of the refugee population,[18] as many men remain in Ukraine due to martial law. Moreover, 10 percent of refugees are aged 60 or older, and 10 percent have disabilities.[19] However, at 14 percent, refugee poverty rates remain lower than other neighbouring countries in the Ukraine response, and also compared to domestic poverty rates of 33.6 percent for Moldovans.[20]

Figure 6 Trends in Arrivals and Departures of Ukrainian Refugees in Moldova
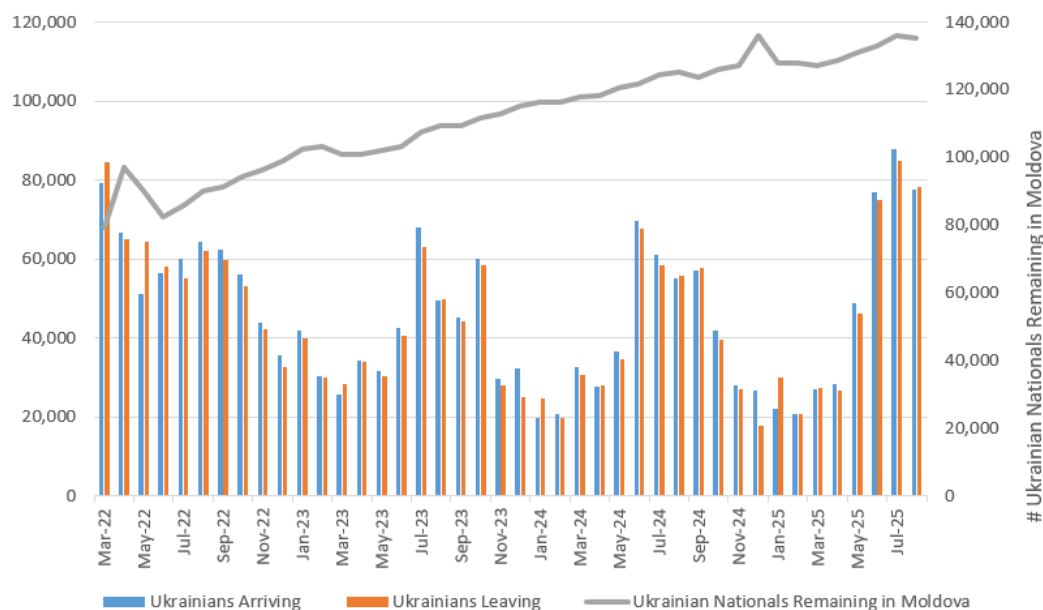
Source: UNHCR[21]

12.   The Government of Moldova has provided assistance to the Ukrainian refugees. In March 2023, the Government introduced the Temporary Protection Law, establishing a legal framework for refugees from Ukraine. The current legislation limits temporary protection holder's access to national health insurance, certain social assistance programs, and self-employment opportunities. Over 71,000 refugees have benefitted from this temporary protection as of March 2025.[22] To date more than 8,000 refugees have regularized their stay through the asylum system or by obtaining residence permits for work, education, or family reunification.[23] In May 2025, the Government approved the National Program on the Phased Integration of Foreigners[24] to facilitate the gradual integration of foreigners including access to education, health, housing, social assistance, and the labour market.

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[17] UNHCR (2025b).

[18] 36 percent women, 21 percent girls, and 23 percent boys. 16 percent are female-headed households with one or more children.

[19] UNHCR (2024a).

[20] UNHCR (2025f).

[21] UNHCR (2025b)

[22] UNHCR (2025a).

[23] UNHCR (2024b).

[24] Government of Moldova (2025a).

13.   The MLSP has integrated some refugees into the national protection system, particularly children, including unaccompanied and separated children, but access remains limited and covers only a small proportion of the refugee population with the highest needs. The national system has limited capacity to handle the increased demands due resource constraints, with only 3.6 percent of refugee households benefiting from national social protection programs.[25] Twenty-nine percent of the refugee population were found to be extremely or highly vulnerable.[26]

14.   Thirty-three percent of refugee households listed employment/livelihood support as their top need.[27] Only 46 percent of refugees between the ages of 15 and 64 are employed, and out of this total only 54 percent have formal contracts while 46 percent work informally. Language barriers and care responsibilities limit refugees' access to the formal labour market.

15.   The war in Ukraine had a significant impact on Moldova's economy, due to its geographic proximity, economic ties, and energy and food dependency on Ukraine and Russia.[28] Since late 2021, the country has faced significant gas price increases, reducing the affordability of energy for citizens.[29] Since 2022, Moldova's power system has been connected to the European continental electricity network and diversified away from Russian gas supplies, with the Right Bank exclusively supplied from EU gas markets in the years that followed. In January 2025, the autonomous territorial administrative units on the left part of Nistru river[30] faced a severe gas supply crisis as Gazprom[31] temporarily suspended deliveries. A potential crisis was averted as an alternative was found in February 2025.[32]

16.   Largely as a result of the war in Ukraine, inflation spiked at almost 34 percent in the third quarter of 2022 (see Figure 7). Inflation dropped to less than 4 percent in 2024, mainly due to lower food and import prices and modest currency appreciation, but has been on an upward trend since.

Figure 7 Annual inflation trends (with forecast), annual by trimester
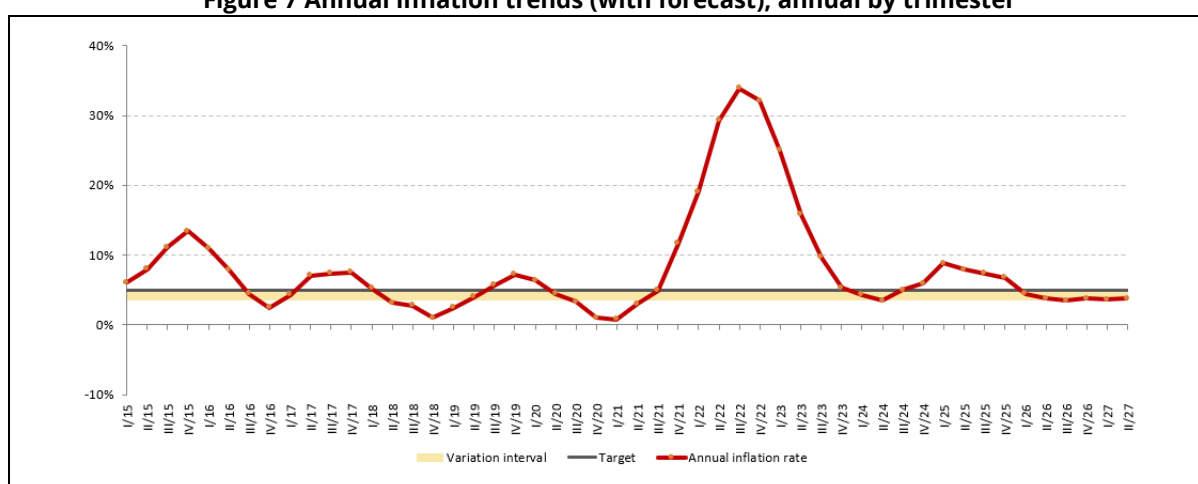
Source: Annual inflation | National Bank of Moldova[33]

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] UNHCR (2024b).

[28] World Bank (2025).

[29] UNDP (2023).

[30] The autonomous territorial administrative units from the left part of Nistru river are generically known as Transnistria.

[31] Gazprom is a Russian majority state-owned multinational energy corporation.

[32] European Commission (2025). EU Comprehensive Strategy for Energy

[33] National Bank of Moldova (2025).

1.2.3. National institutions and frameworks

17.   A variety of social protection programmes are available to support poor and crisis - affected Moldovans, and to a limited extent refugees. The social protection system encompasses social insurance, social assistance, social care services, and active labour market interventions. From the perspective of war - affected populations a key programme is Ajutor Social - the cash transfer of last resort for poor households designed to Guarantee Minimum Incomes (GMI) to households.

18.   The social protection system takes 38 percent of the total national government budget expenditure in Moldova. While expenditure has grown dramatically, from MDL 29 billion in the year 2021 to an approved envelope of MDL 53 billion for the year 2025,[34] this is mainly inflation related increases. The specific allocations to social assistance (as opposed to social insurance and care services) in the MLSP budget decreased from 3.6 to 3.1 percent over the same period.

19.   The MLSP is the principal policy authority regulating social protection, while Territorial Agencies for Social Assistance (STAS) are the administrative authorities under MLSP responsible for implementation.[35] The STAS employs approximately 10,000 social workers, with a high turnover in the workforce due to work pressure and low salaries[36]. The State Social Inspectorate is a public administration authority subordinate to the MLSP, responsible for certifying the capacity of social service providers and for exercising state control in the field of social assistance.[37] All social assistance payments are made by the National Office of Social Insurance of the Republic of Moldova (NOSI / Casa Națională de Asigurări Sociale (CNAS)), which is a central administrative authority subordinated to the Government of Moldova that administers and manages the public social insurance system.[38]

20.   As part of the EU accession process, Moldova committed to implementing multiple reforms, including the reform of the full public administration, and several reforms of the social protection system.[39] 2022 and 2023 reforms to Ajutor Social by MLSP include tightening up the eligibility criteria for households with unemployed members to incentivise employment. In 2024 the Government adopted the RESTART strategy to reform the social assistance system to better mitigate the effects of inflation, reduce social risks and maintain social peace.[40]

Box 1   Government Reforms of Social Assistance

Over the period of WFP's engagement in Moldova, the Government committed to implementing multiple reforms, including the reform of the public administration at large, and several reform actions of the social protection system, strongly influenced by the EU accession process.[44] Specifically the MLSP initiated a series of reforms in 2022 and 2023 to Ajutor Social[46] to stimulate progress in reducing poverty in households with children and to tighten up the eligibility criteria for households with unemployed members. As an incentive to enter the job market, if there was an unemployed family member the payment of allowances to the entire household ended 12 months of first receiving cash payments.

In response to an internal analysis of weaknesses in the social protection system, MLSP adopted the RESTART strategy in March 2023[41] to substantially reform the social protection system to better mitigate

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[34] Ministry of Finance (2025)

[35] In December 2023, as part of the RESTART reform the Government created 10 Territorial Agencies for Social Assistance (ATAS) as an intermediate layer each managing three to four STAS and channelling to them the budget coming from the central level.

[36] MLSP. (2023).

[37] State Social Inspectorate (2025).

[38] CNAS / NOSI (2025).

[39] Government of Moldova. (2025). Government Decision 1167 / 2008 modified by Government Decisions 655 / 2022 and 159 / 2025. HG1167/2008(in Romanian)

[40] MLSP (2023).

[41] Government of the Republic of Moldova (2023).

the effects of inflation, reduce social risks and maintain social peace[42], with the objective of achieving four medium term results by 2026. These are that: (1) Vulnerable populations have increased access to social services and benefits, (2) Social services comply with minimum quality standards and adequately meet the population needs, (3) Social assistance system has sufficient and motivated human resources able to provide quality social services and benefits, and (4) Social assistance system is digitalized to ensure efficiency and reduce fraud.[43]

21. The Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund (EVRF), managed by MLSP, introduced at the end of 2022 aims to reduce energy poverty caused by high inflation, increased energy prices and uncertain supply of energy resources. It compensated energy bills at household level and later provided cash transfers to beneficiaries' accounts. In total, 720,000 households — approximately 1.46 million people (61 percent of the population) received compensation during the 2024-2025 heating season.

22. Since its independence in 1991, the country made steady progress in developing a broadly adequate institutional and legal Disaster Risk Management (DRM) framework, especially on the response side. However, roles and responsibilities for strategic oversight, planning, coordination, and implementation of risk identification, reduction, and response measures had not been defined and multiple elements required improvement, including the need for enhanced preparedness, stronger financial protection mechanisms and resilient recovery and reconstruction policies.[44] The General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is in charge of planning, coordinating, and managing disaster preparedness and emergency management.[45]

23. This changed during the past year, with the adoption of the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy for 2024-2030, the launch of the INFORM Index in February 2024 helping authorities understand local disaster risks and supporting data-driven decision-making,[46] the adoption of the organic Law on the Management of Crisis Situations in July 2025[47] and the establishment of a National Crisis Management Centre announced in September 2025. The latter is expected be responsible for formally coordinating the entire crisis management process, ranging from prevention and preparedness to effective response during crises and learning from past experiences.[48] According to informants, it will take some time for these changes to become operational. National policies relating to refugees have been progressively put in place. The temporary protection regime was activated in Moldova at the end of March 2023, more than one year after the start of the refugee crisis and has been renewed on a yearly basis. This provided refugees from Ukraine with a more stable and predictable status but granted them only limited access to the national social protection system.[49] The key planning document framing refugee inclusion in Moldova is the Government decision 285/2025, which approved in May the National Programme on the Phased Integration of Foreigners in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2025-2027, including an Action Plan with timelines and estimated budgets and sources of funding.[50]

1.2.4. Development and humanitarian assistance

24. The twin frameworks for coordinating international assistance are the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), which articulates the collective development vision of the

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[42] MLSP (2023).

[43] Idem

[44] World Bank and GFDRR (2020).

[45] WFP (2024c).

[46] UN Moldova (2025b)

[47] Parliament of Moldova (2025).

[48] Moldova1 News (2025).

[49] Government of the Republic of Moldova (2023b)

[50] Government of Moldova. (2025a).

United Nations for Moldova for 2023 to 2027 and the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine, which is the planning and fundraising instrument for humanitarian partners.[51]

25.   Net Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Moldova has grown significantly from 342 million USD in 2019 to above 500 million in both 2020 and 2021 and increased further after the start of the war in Ukraine to 886 million USD in 2022 and 1,051 million USD in 2023.[52] In addition, the World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) financing under the Moldova Country Programme Framework for 2023-2027 was agreed up to USD 550 million.[53] ODA is projected to decline from 2025. Reductions announced by the governments of the United States of America, France and Germany are expected to have a significant impact.[54] The top ten ODA donors for Moldova for 2022 and 2023 combined are shown in Figure 8 below, showing the EU institutions as the top donor in both years.

Figure 8 Top 10 ODA providers to Moldova in 2022 and 2023 (USD million)
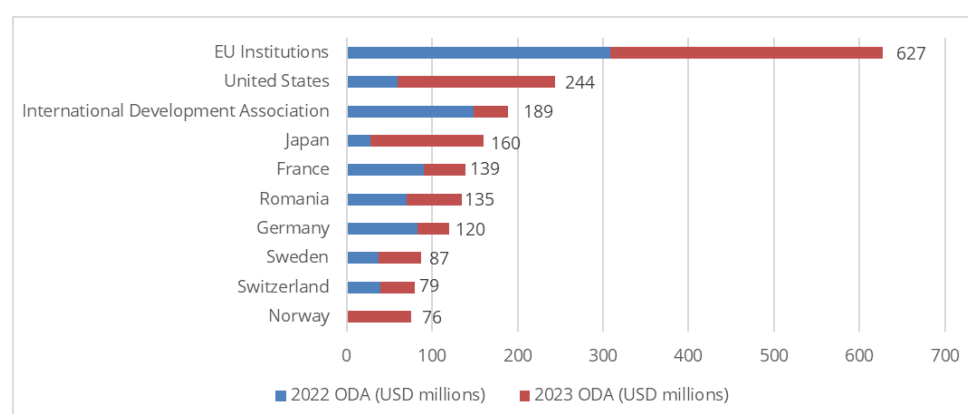
Source: [Official development assistance at a glance | OECD](#)[55]

26.   The EU is the largest provider of financial assistance to Moldova, supporting socioeconomic development and reforms in Moldova, with financial and technical assistance. Since 2020, the EU has made available 2.2 billion EUR in loans and grants.[56] However, support for social protection represents a negligible part of EU assistance to Moldova as neither the Government nor the EU has prioritised this sector.

27.   RRP funding rates for Moldova have varied between 73 percent (2022), 113 percent (2023) and 56 percent (2024), with main donors for 2025 indicated in Table 1.[57] In 2025, top RRP recipients were United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (25.6 million USD),   United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (12.5 million USD),   and International Organization for Migration (IOM) (11   million USD). WFP received 8 million USD.

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[51] UNHCR (2024b).

[52] OECD (2024a).

[53] World Bank (2022).

[54] The OECD projects a 9 to 17 percent drop in ODA in 2025. This comes on top of a 9 percent drop in 2024. This decline is driven by announced cuts from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, show are four major providers of ODA; (OECD, 2025)

[55] OECD (2024b)

[56] This includes multiple disbursements for different periods. For example, a dedicated Reform and Growth Facility which provides support from 2025 to 2027, and is expected to provide up to Eur 385 million in grants and Eur 1.5 billion in loans; https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/moldova/

[57] Ibid.

Table 1. Top ten donors of the Moldova RRP 2025

Donors	Value (USD)
United States of America	24,000,000
European Union	14,110,020
United Kingdom	8,518,333
Norway	5,808,635
Germany	5,530,924
Switzerland	4,336,534
Sweden	850,000
Czech Republic	784,575
Denmark	729,927
Iceland	264,971

Source: Refugee Funding Tracker[58]

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[58] Inter-Agency Financial Portal for Refugee Response Plans (2025).

1.3. Subject being evaluated

28. The geographical scope of this decentralized evaluation is national, and covers the period from March 2022 to August 2025.

1.3.1. WFP Programmes in Moldova

29. The timeline of WFP operations in Moldova, set against key contextual events, is summarised in Figure 9.

30. WFP activities commenced in February 2022 as part of the Budget Revision (BR) to the LEO responding to the Ukraine crisis (see Figure 11), which added activities to support refugees in neighbouring countries, including Moldova. Under the LEO WFP Moldova provided vouchers to institutions to support the provision of hot meals to refugees housed in Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs) and cash transfers to Refugee Hosting Households (RHH) to reduce the economic burden on hosting households, increase access to accommodation for refugees and promote social cohesion. Planning and implementation of activities under the LEO involved consultation and coordination with the MLSP, UNHCR and other United Nations partners through established humanitarian and development coordination mechanisms. WFP also began engaging with the government and development partners to identify how it could contribute to strengthening national social protection.

31. A T-ICSP followed the LEO and initially covered the period from September 2022 to August 2023 and was subsequently extended by six months. The T-ICSP continued 'to support the Government of Moldova with an emergency response to the conflict, while expanding efforts to address structural issues and meet the increasing needs of refugee, host communities and extremely vulnerable Moldovan households, under three SOs (Table 2 below).

Table 2. Moldova T-ICSP outcomes, outputs and activities

Strategic Outcome	Output	Activity
SO1: Crisis-affected populations in Moldova can meet their food and other essential needs throughout the year	Output 1: Targeted groups receive unconditional transfers to meet their essential needs	Activity 1: Provide emergency cash and voucher transfers to crisis-affected populations
SO2: The Government of Moldova has enhanced social protection and food security capacities and systems to support vulnerable populations by 2023	Output 2: The Government receives technical assistance and support from WFP to strengthen components of national emergency preparedness and response, social protection, and food systems	Activity 2: Provide technical assistance to the Government to enhance shock-responsive social protection and food security systems and capacities.
SO3: Humanitarian and Development partners benefit from services provided to support vulnerable populations in Moldova throughout the year	Output 3: Partners benefit from on-demand services to support vulnerable populations	Activity 3: Provide on-demand services to partners

Source: WFP Transition Interim Country Strategic Plan Document 2022

32. Emergency Financial Assistance (EFA) was provided over the winter period of 2022–2023 through a coordinated effort between the MLSP and several United Nations agencies, as a top-up for Ajutor Social beneficiaries affected by the crisis. This assistance continued over the two subsequent winters, reframed as Cash to Vulnerable Moldovans (CVM). In addition, the T-ICSP committed to a responsible exit through providing technical support to the MLSP to strengthen the institutional capacity of the government to implement SRSP activities while maintaining the capacity to scale up humanitarian assistance as needed. SO2 was added to enhance the shock-responsiveness, effectiveness, coverage and adequacy of the national social protection system, in particular by strengthening the poverty focussed *Ajutor Social* cash transfer programme. It also added SO3 to provide on-demand services, including the design and implementation of cash transfers, to other partners in-country - although SO3 was never activated.

Figure 9 Timeline of WFP programme

WFP strategies

- **GLOBAL** WFP Strategic Plan (2022-2026)
- March 2022: WFP begins operations in Moldova under the LEO for Ukraine and refugees-hosting countries
- **WFP CO** established in February 2023
- **WFP CO** Following the LEO, the T-ICSP is implemented to sustain the emergency response and initiate a bridge with longer-term food security interventions
- **WFP CO** The T-ICSP is extended by 6 months (until February 2024) to bridge with timeline required before approval of ICSP. The extension also adapted to evolution of caseloads
- **WFP CO** design focusses on balancing provision of direct support with technical assistance towards a responsible exit by end of ICSP
- **GLOBAL** June 2025: New WFP Strategic Plan (2026-2029) is drafted

LEO & (T)-ICSP key stages

- Ukraine LEO Feb-Oct 2022
- Moldova T-ICSP Sept 2022 – Feb 2024
- Moldova ICSP March 2024-Feb 2026

WFP activities

- RHH: Cash transfers to Refugee Hosting Households to reduce the economic burden on hosting households, increase access to accommodation for refugees and promote social cohesion
- EFA: Emergency Financial Assistance provided to crisis affected vulnerable Moldovans
- **Social protection system strengthening** (ongoing)
- **RHH and RAC support** (March 2022- ongoing)
- **EFA** (Winter 2022-2023)
- **CVM**: Winter 2023-2024
- **CVM**: Winter 2024-2025
- RAC support: commodity vouchers to institutions to support the provision of hot meals to refugees housed in RACs

Timeline: 2020 — 2021 — 2022 — 2023 — 2024 — 2025 — 2026

Institutional changes

- July 2021: snap parliamentary elections held in Moldova
- A series of state of emergency decrees, renewed every 60 days, ensured that Ukrainian refugees had the right to remain in Moldova.
- The MLSP initiates a series of reforms to Ajutor Social
- March 2023: Moldova introduces the Temporary Protection Law for Ukrainian refugees
- March 2023: the MLSP launches the reform of the social assistance system "RESTART"
- Moldova commits to implement multiple reforms (including of SP systems)
- Dec 2023: the government of Moldova approves the creation of Territorial Agencies for Social Assistance (ATAS, under MLSP)
- January 2024: Start of the implementation of RESTART reforms
- September 2025: Parliamentary elections in Moldova

Contextual events

- 2020: Covid-19 large scale response by MLSP
- 2020: Moldova is hit by one of the most severe droughts over the past 20 years
- Since Oct 2021: Moldova enters an energy crisis (significant gas price increases, reducing the affordability of energy for citizens)
- February 2022: Large-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Moldova becomes a recipient and transit country for refugees from the war in Ukraine.
- June 2022: the EC grants Moldova candidate status
- October 2022: Inflation peak in Moldova (34.6%)
- December 2023: the European Commission opens accession negotiations (official start in June 2024 for first clusters)
- October 2024: Presidential elections held in Moldova
- December 2024 to September 2025: Election period in Moldova
- Winter 2024-2025: Gas crisis

33. A subsequent ICSP was approved in February 2024, covering the period from March 2024 to February 2026 with a much stronger focus on capacity strengthening of the national systems and preparing for an eventual exit. It maintained the Strategic Outcomes and reduced the budget to similar levels of the original T-ICSP, although CVM was moved from SO1 in the TiCSP to SO2 in the ICSP. Programming included a stronger emphasis on transition to local delivery mechanisms, whether through cooperating partners or the government, technical assistance to the national social protection system, and reinforcing coordination structures and partnerships. While both the T-ICSP and ICSP commit to mainstreaming gender equality, conflict sensitivity, protection and AAP across the portfolio, the ICSP explicitly emphasises beneficiary-centred approaches with community-based participatory planning to ensure equitable involvement of women and men, people living with disabilities, and those from minority groups.

34. The T-ICSP and ICSP provides the formal accountability framework for the evaluation and specific commitments in relation to capacity strengthening are summarised in Table 3. It is important to note that the T-ICSP and ICSP are explicit that WFP will conduct these activities in partnership with the Government, UN agencies and other actors. It should also be noted that strengthening of food systems fall outside of the scope of the evaluation.

Table 3. T-ICSP and ICSP Capacity Strengthening Outputs and Activities

Plans	Outputs	Activities
T-ICSP	The Government receives technical assistance and support from WFP to strengthen components of national emergency preparedness and response, social protection and food systems	Create an interoperable and integrated digital data ecosystem with the capacity to expand beneficiary populations under different shocks.
		Digitalization of the delivery system and supporting the development of a more sophisticated management information system.
		Establish and strengthen community kitchens as part of shock response.
		Provide technical expertise and assistance on food security and food systems, including data and policies related to agricultural value chains.
ICSP	2.1 The Government benefits from an enhanced shock responsive social protection system	Technical capacity support, policy advice and operational guidance to MLSP to address gaps and promote the expansion of programmes to improve the shock-responsiveness of the social protection system.
		Support the use of digitalization to address data gaps and accuracy, improving interoperability and linkages between databases for referrals and access to services.
		Enhance the capacity of local social food services, to serve both refugees and vulnerable Moldovan populations.
		Strengthen linkages between local food producers and institutions providing social food services.
		Foster social cohesion between refugees and their hosts, including through targeting approaches, community outreach and communication, the tracking of social cohesion gains, and the identification and mitigation of risks.
	2.2 Help vulnerable Moldovan populations to meet their food and other essential needs.	Provide cash top-ups to Moldovans utilizing existing cash assistance programmes.

Source: WFP Moldova T-ICSP and ICSP documents.

35. Neither the T-ICSP nor the ICSP included a full Theory of Change (ToC), which was not required at the time of the design. However, during the first year of the ICSP the CO developed a ToC to further elaborate

its internal approach to capacity strengthening under SO2.59 (Figure 10). This identified three main pathways of change: (i) Increasing the fiscal space and functioning of Ajutor Social to allow better coverage of the most vulnerable people whilst opening the way for refugee inclusion (with sub-pathways relating to improved quality and efficiency, reduced inclusion and exclusion errors and advocacy for investment), (ii) improved shock responsiveness of the national social protection system, and (iii) strengthened social canteens.

36.   During inception the SO2 ToC was adapted by the Evaluation Team (ET) to include links to the higher-level objectives, synergies with the SO1 CBTs and identify assumptions – i.e. factors beyond the control of WFP - that were necessary conditions for the pathways of change to be realized (Annex 3). This ToC provided a useful frame of reference to support the learning objective of the evaluation. While not used as an accountability tool it provided helpful insights into how the WFP conceptualization of potential areas of capacity strengthening support to the MLSP evolved and were negotiated. Concrete agreements with MLSP on capacity strengthening activities were formalized through Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) (see Annex 9 for a full list).

37.   During the evaluation it was noted that the adapted ToC does not fully bring out links to refugee integration and, the coordination role of WFP to influence refugee integration. This partly explained as several of the refugee response activities were already underway under the T-ICSP. However, these activities were captured within the scope of the evaluation findings and report.

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[59] WFP (2024d)

Figure 10 SO2 Capacity Strengthening Theory of Change
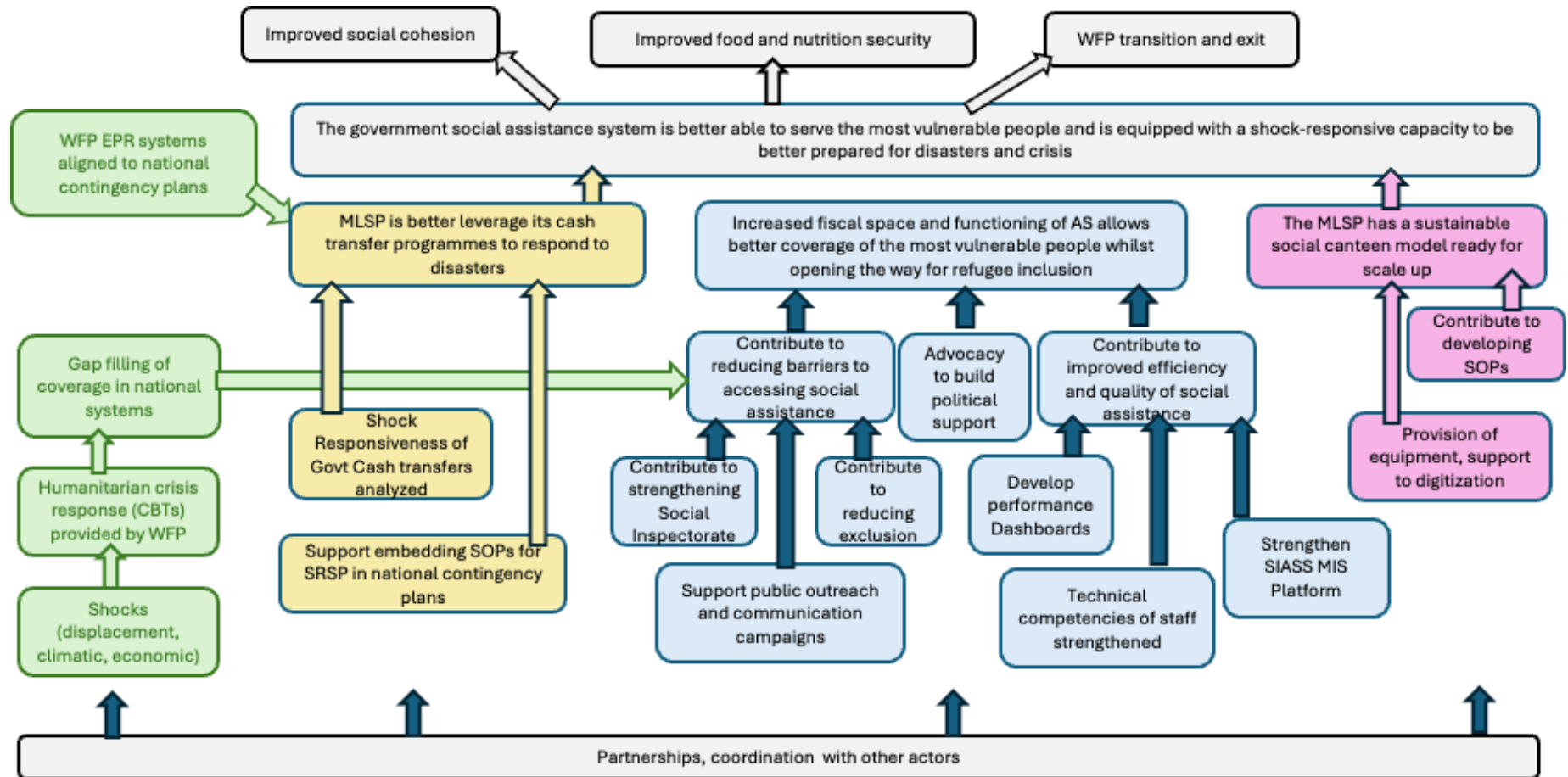
1.3.2. Resource mobilization

38. Figure 11 gives an overview of the transition from LEO to T-ICSP to ICSP, including four budget revisions (BRs). A further draft BR for a no cost extension of the ICSP for up to an additional 12 months was yet to be approved.

Figure 11 Overview of Plans and Budget Revisions 2022-2026[60]
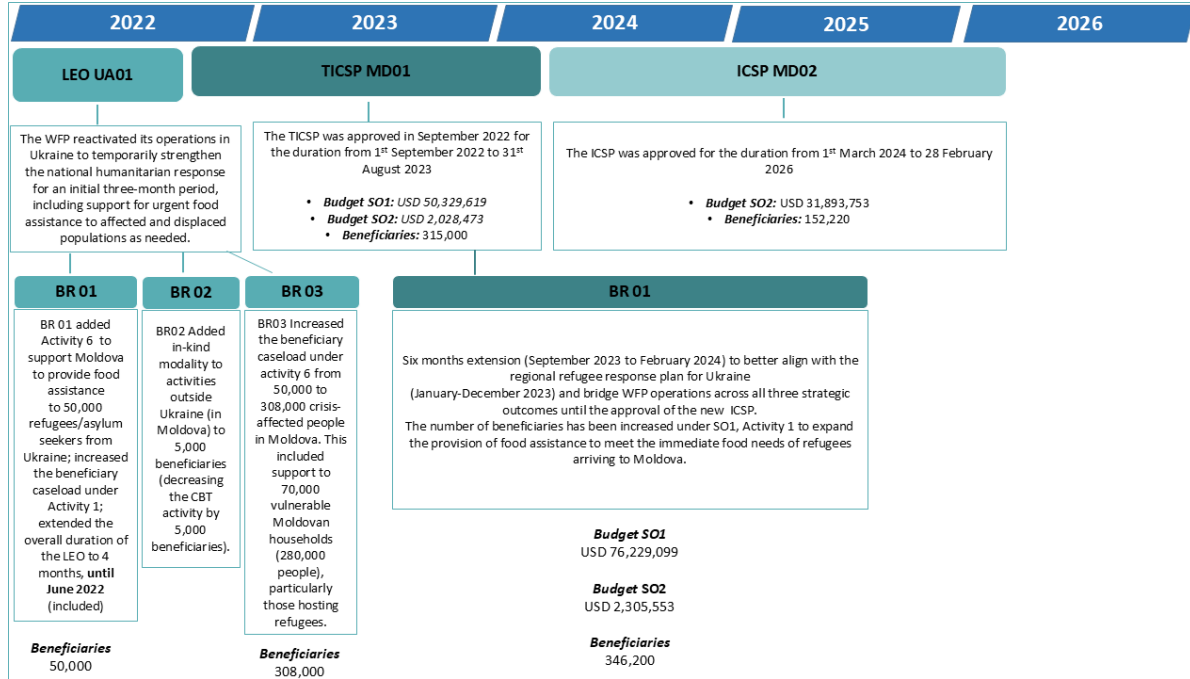
Source : WFP LEO 2022, T-ICSP 2022, and ICSP 2024

39. An overview of the funding level against each of the programmes is given in Table 4. The LEO was designed to respond to a rapidly evolving and uncertain situation. Ultimately needs proved smaller than originally anticipated – as reflected in the four BRs during the nine-months LEO. The T-ICSP and ICSP were well-funded, with funding exceeding the implementation plan (IP) for all years.

Table 4. Summary of funding levels for the LEO, T-ICSP and ICSP

CPB	Year	NBP	IP	Carry-over / RT	Funding	Total funding	Expenditures	Funding as % of NBP	Funding as % of IP
LEO	2022	27,703,870	27,703,870		13,587,098	13,587,098	6,480,865	49%	49%
T-ICSP	2022	35,063,849	14,787,645	7,106,233	36,644,844	43,751,077	6,374,424	125%	296%
T-ICSP	2023	43,048,542	38,133,047	35,096,965	26,920,820	62,017,784	37,342,162	144%	163%
T-ICSP/ICSP	2024[61]	38,153,743	29,080,285	25,316,309	29,759,735	55,076,044	37,914,634	144%	189%
ICSP	2025	28,344,014	15,552,230	17,272,990	6,329,403	23,602,393	11,016,480	83%	152%
ICSP	2026	1,527,551							

Source: LEO T-ICSP and ICSP funding Overview (as of 22 August 2025)

40. Since 2022, the top five donors to the LEO, T-ICSP and ICSP have been the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO), the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the United Kingdom (UK) Foreign, Commonwealth and Development

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[60] BR04 of the LEO has been excluded as it had no impact on budget nor number of beneficiaries.

Office (FCDO), Norway, and the United Nations agencies[61] (Figure 12). WFP Moldova also received flexible funding from the private sector (Total Energies).

Figure 12 Funding received for LEO (Activity 6), T-ICSP and ICSP
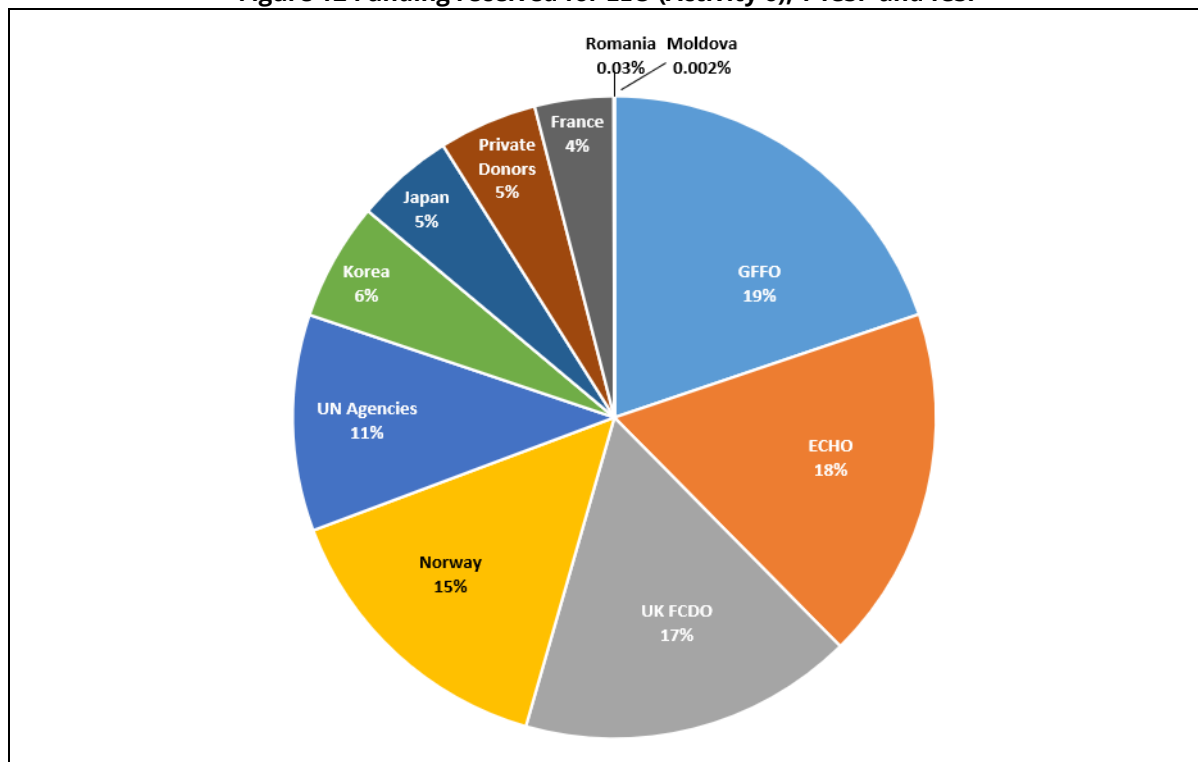
Source: LEO T-ICSP and ICSP funding Overview as of August 2025

1.3.3.   Performance

41.   WFP reached fewer beneficiaries with CBTs (including residents in RACs, RHHs and EFA/CVM) than planned across the LEO, T-ICSP and ICSP (Figure 13). While the LEO reached just 13 percent of the target in 2022, this can be largely explained by the high degree of uncertainty in the initial emergency response. The TICSP and ICSP reached 85 percent.

Figure 13 Planned versus actual beneficiaries (Tier 1) reached by WFP in Moldova
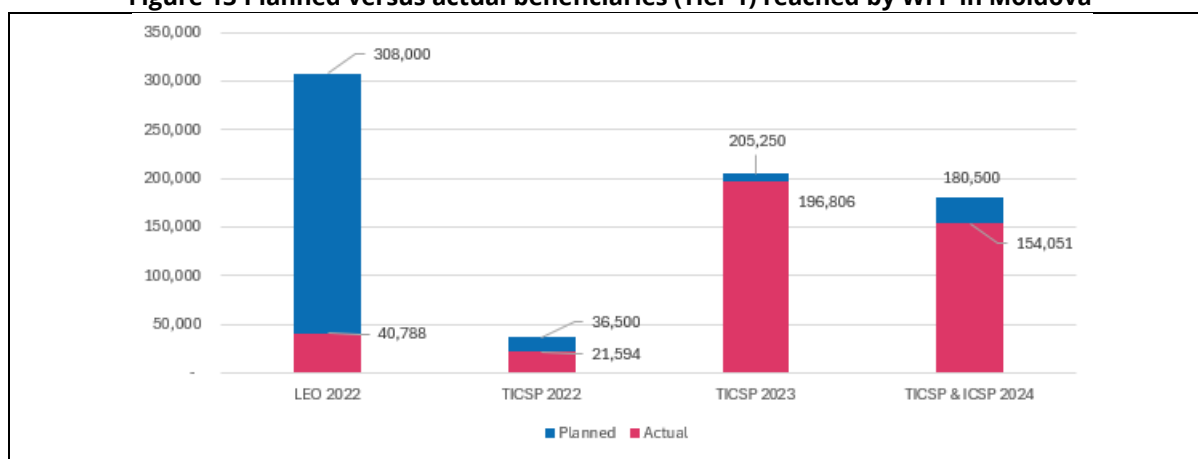
Source: COMET and WFP Ukraine ACR 2022

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[61] Local UN-agencies provided funding to WFP to jointly implement EFA/CVM transfers.

42.   WFP targeted socio-economically distinct groups, including refugees, refugee-hosting households and vulnerable Moldovan households identified through the poverty-targeted Ajutor Social programme, with a majority of planned and actual beneficiaries among the resident population (see Figure 14).[62]

Figure 14 Planned versus actual beneficiaries (Tier 1) reached by WFP in Moldova by residence status
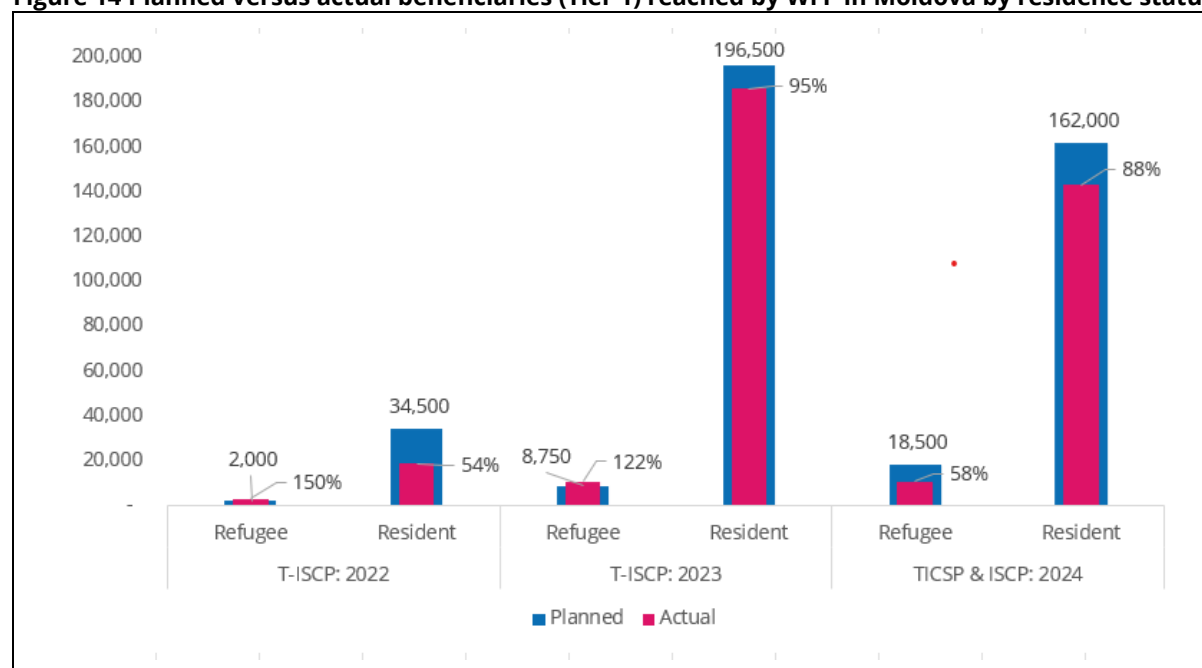
43.   Across the LEO, T-ICSP and ICSP programmes WFP planned to reach 53 percent female beneficiaries and exceeded this target, reaching 58 percent female beneficiaries in the same period (see Figure 15).

Figure 15 Moldova LEO, T-ICSP and ICSP proportion of beneficiaries reached by sex, 2022-2024

44.   Progress in delivering capacity strengthening outputs is challenging to summarise against targets. The T-ICSP and ICSP only provided a broad description of capacity strengthening activities. While several more detailed capacity strengthening plans were developed these continuously evolved over the course of implementation. Key capacity strengthening activities, as reported in the Annual Country Reports (ACR), have been summarised by the ET in Table 5 against the T-ICSP and ICSP activities (see Figure 10). This does not

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[62] Non-implemented contingency activities were removed from the total NBP figures.

include reporting in relation to capacity strengthening activities conducted during 2025. The ACRs also include quantitative indicators on the delivery of capacity strengthening outputs, however the highly aggregated indicators at the output level[63] were of limited use for the evaluation. A more detailed discussion on capacity strengthening outputs is given in the findings section of this report.

Table 5. ACR reporting of capacity strengthening mapped against ToC pathways (2022-2024)[64]

Plans	T-ICSP/ICSP Activities	ACR reporting
T-ICSP	Create an interoperable and integrated digital data ecosystem with the capacity to expand beneficiary populations under different shocks. Digitalization of the delivery system and supporting the development of a more sophisticated management information system.	A new beneficiary data management platform (AID.MD) was developed and funded by UNHCR, MLSP, WFP, and UNICEF, for the MLSP to provide a unified beneficiary management database for humanitarian support efforts accessible by different partners (2022). Training provided to social assistants (2022, 2023)
	Establish and strengthen community kitchens as part of shock response.	Assessment of the capacities and infrastructure of selected local social canteens that provide cooked meals for vulnerable populations (2022)
ICSP	Technical capacity support, policy advice and operational guidance to MLSP to address gaps and promote the expansion of programmes to improve the shock-responsiveness of the social protection system.	Workshopping Standard Operating Practices for emergency cash transfer programmes (2024) Technical support and expert advice to the MLSP on enhancing and institutionalising the refugee-hosting households registration platform (UAHelp.MD) (2024) Produced a Common Country Assessment for SRSP[65] and analysed three National Disaster Contingency Plans (2024) Trainings provided to Government staff on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Case Management (2023, 2024)
	Support the use of digitalization to address data gaps and accuracy, improving interoperability and linkages between databases for referrals and access to services.	Led Workstream 1 of the United Nations Digitalization Working Group in evaluating 14 Management Information Systems (MIS) used by the MLSP to support an updated, interoperable system (2023, 2024) Business Process Mapping exercise and support to the design and production of indicators for a Management Dashboard for the Ajutor Social Programme (2024) Technical support to improve IT security measures for Posta Moldovei to safeguard beneficiary data for the RHH programme (2024) Supported the development of a cash assurance payments framework to ensure the effective distribution of MLSP cash payments (2023, 2024)
	Enhance the capacity of local social food services, to serve both refugees and vulnerable Moldovan populations.	Collaborated with the MLSP and local authorities to design projects for rehabilitating or installing kitchens in one village and one RAC (2024) Assisting in the procurement and testing of a mobile canteen for the Government to provide hot meals as part of emergency response to disasters and crises (2024)
	Provide cash top-ups to Moldovans utilizing existing cash assistance programmes.	CVM provided in 2023/24 and 2024/25

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[63] ACR indicators include "Number of governmental institutions engaged in WFP capacity strengthening activities", "Number of technical assistance activities provided" and "Number of training sessions/workshops organized".

[64] This report does not include food system development and social cohesion activities (although none were reported) as they lay outside the scope of the report.

65 Shock-Responsive Social Protection is a strategy to link existing social safety nets (like cash transfers) to disaster response, making them flexible enough to help people during shocks like floods or economic crises, so that aid reaches vulnerable groups faster and more effectively.

1.4. Evaluation methodology, limitations and ethical considerations

45.   As specified in the ToRs, the evaluation adopted the standard United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) / Development Assistance Commission (DAC) evaluation criteria including relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability (see Evaluation Matrix in Annex 4). The evaluation adopted a theory-based approach, guided by the ToC developed by the CO in support of their ICSP capacity strengthening activities. This ToC provided the foundation for exploring causal linkages between WFP's interventions and observed results. It was discussed and validated during an inception-phase workshop with CO staff, where key assumptions were identified. These assumptions informed lines of enquiry for the evaluation (see Annex 3 for a table that shows the linkages between the Evaluation questions (EQs) to assumptions).

46.   During the inception phase, the EQs were refined jointly with the CO to ensure conceptual clarity, focus on the most critical issues, and avoid overlaps. The five EQs are detailed in Table 6 below. The EQs and associated sub-questions were expanded into indicators with associated data sources and analysis methods in the evaluation matrix, which provided a structured framework for data analysis (see Annex 4).

Table 6. Evaluation questions

Evaluation Questions	OECD/DAC Criteria
EQ1 To what extent are WFP interventions relevant to meeting the needs of the vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and of MLSP?	Relevance
EQ2 How coherent have WFP interventions been with broader social protection policies and programmes in Moldova and how has WFP ensured synergies between its cash-based transfers (CBT) and social protection capacity strengthening support?	Coherence & Coordination
EQ3 To what extent have WFP's capacity strengthening, food and cash assistance interventions been efficient to meet the needs of vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and national social protection systems?	Efficiency
EQ4 To what extent have WFP interventions contributed to, or are they expected to contribute to, strengthening the institutional capacities of the MLSP and addressing the essential needs of vulnerable population in Moldova?	Effectiveness & Sustainability
EQ5 How have WFP activities been designed and conducted to facilitate a responsible exit by WFP?	Sustainability

47.   Building on the ToC, the evaluation used mixed methods combining both deductive (e.g. through theory-drive contribution analysis) and inductive approaches (e.g. through outcome harvesting) to strengthen validity and provide a nuanced understanding of WFP's contribution to national social protection systems.

48.   An evaluability assessment was conducted to inform the evaluation design. A key evaluability challenge was the limited monitoring of outputs and outcomes related to strengthening government systems and capacity, constraining the use of methods reliant solely on secondary data. Given WFP's focus on capacity strengthening, as well as the collaborative nature of its work — involving multiple actors such as national institutions, United Nations agencies, and donors — the evaluation adopted contribution analysis as a core method. This approach is particularly appropriate in complex social systems where multiple factors influence outcomes. Contribution analysis was used to develop a credible, evidence-based contribution story, assessing how far WFP's interventions plausibly contributed to observed results at different levels of the results chain. It enabled the ET to test the validity of the ToC, explore alternative explanations, and triangulate evidence from diverse data sources. Drawing on both secondary and primary data, the ET systematically examined causal linkages between WFP's activities, outputs, and outcomes, identifying contextual and institutional factors that either supported or constrained WFP's contribution. Annex 3 provides further details the main steps undertaken in the contribution analysis process.

49.   To complement the theory-driven contribution analysis, the evaluation applied outcome harvesting to understand WFP's contribution from the perspective of direct beneficiaries of capacity strengthening. This method was particularly useful in a context where multiple agencies support capacity strengthening, and

WFP does not have sufficient outcome-level reporting data on these interventions. Outcome harvesting enabled the evaluation to capture observed changes and assess WFP's contribution systematically. The ET engaged social assistants and other public-sector professionals who had received WFP trainings and are responsible for delivering frontline social assistance services. FGDs and KIIs with these stakeholders were conducted following an outcome harvesting approach, using discussion formats open enough to capture both direct and indirect outcomes experienced by participants (see Annex 5 for FGD and KII protocols). During these discussions, participants identified and described the outcomes they had experienced, while the ET facilitated a process of working backwards to explore how WFP's interventions may have contributed to these changes. Following the FGDs/KIIs, the ET further analyzed and triangulated the reported outcomes to develop a credible, evidence-based assessment of WFP's contribution across the results chain.

Figure 16 Data collection sites
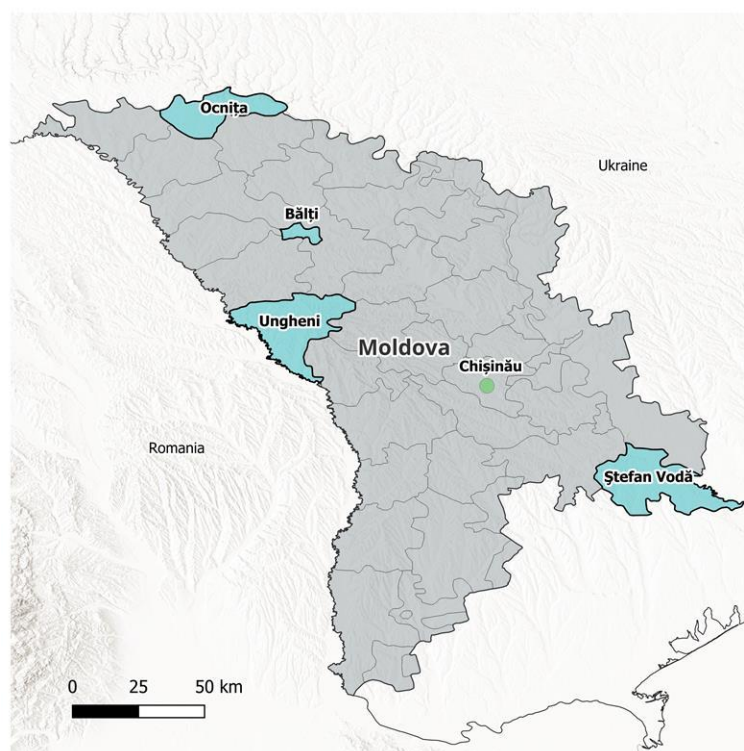
Source: Mokoro

50.	Evidence was drawn from both primary and secondary data sources using a mixed-methods design. The evaluation began with a systematic review of secondary data, with a particular emphasis on a wealth of internal technical reviews and plans that WFP Moldova has produced to support in the development of its strategic approach in Moldova (see Figure 25). Secondary documentation also included monitoring, HR, finance and donor relations documentation. This review allowed the ET to address some EQs and identify gaps in evidence, which informed the design of primary data collection tools and sampling of stakeholders.

51.	Primary data collection employed the techniques of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), complemented by a small sample of sites for field observations. These techniques were derived from the evaluation matrix and adapted to specific stakeholder groups to ensure comprehensive coverage of all EQs. The evaluation engaged WFP staff from Headquarters, the Regional Office, and the CO, as well as United Nations partners, implementation partners, and national and district-level government representatives and frontline service providers.

52.	Primary data collection took place during a two-week mission in Moldova in August 2025 with sub-national data collection in Balti, Ocnita, Stefan Voda and Ungheni (see Figure 16). These locations were

sampled according to criteria defined in the inception phase (see Annex 3 for criteria and locations sampled).[66]

53.   In total 69 key informants were interviewed by the ET (36 men and 33 women) at national and WFP HQ and regional levels. The breakdown of stakeholders for KIIs is presented in Figure 17 (left). An additional 76 stakeholders (13 men, 63 women) participated in FGDs and KIIs at the district level and this included representatives from the Mayor's Office (6), STAS (4), Social Assistants (31), RAC Managers (2), RHH Beneficiaries (10), CVM Beneficiaries (7), RAC Beneficiaries (16). The breakdown of district level interviews is also presented in Figure 17 (right).

Figure 17 KIIs at national, regional and HQ levels (left) and KIIs and FGDs at district level (right)
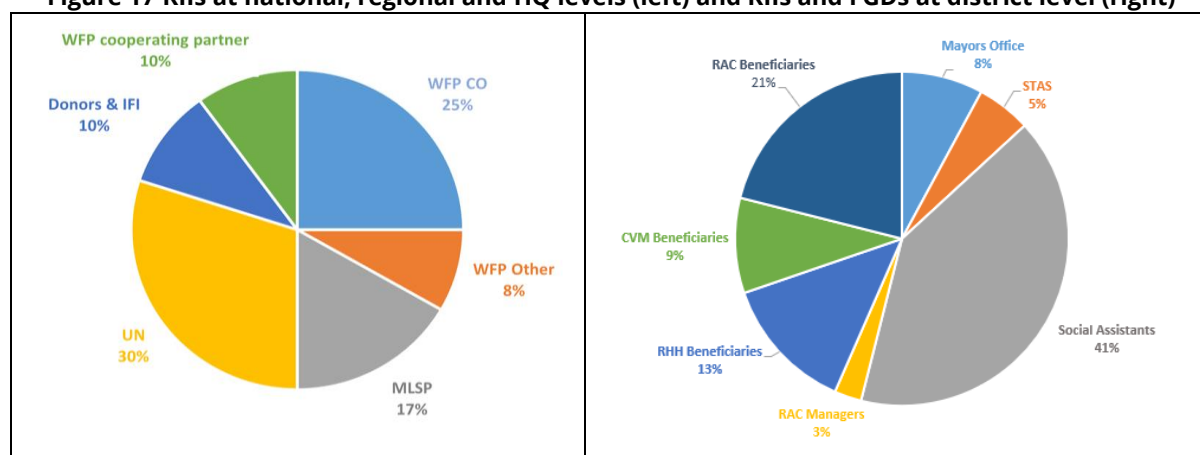
Source: Mokoro

54.   Following data collection, the KIIs and FGD transcripts were coded and analysed according to each evaluation question and sub-question. During the synthesis of the data, the ET engaged in a review and joint analysis of findings in order to scrutinize the evidence and conduct additional triangulation where required. An initial presentation of findings on the Tuesday 9 September 2025 provided further opportunities for validating early findings.

55.   The evaluation mainstreamed gender equality and inclusion objectives throughout its design and implementation. These were integrated into the Theory of Change, evaluation questions, and sampling strategy to ensure representation of women, older people, and socially excluded groups (including Roma communities). During data collection, gender-sensitive protocols were applied, and analysis systematically used disaggregated data and a gender and inclusion lens to capture intersectional vulnerabilities and ensure diverse perspectives informed findings and recommendations.

56.   The data collection process for this evaluation faced few limitations and the ET have a high degree of confidence in the results. Evaluability challenges were sufficiently captured at inception phase, allowing for mitigation measures to be put in place and allowing the team to maintain confidence in the robustness of the findings. In particular:

- Strategic shifts between the LEO, T-ICSP and ICSP risked limiting the ability to assess progress over time. This was mitigated by framing the analysis around how and why these shifts occurred and using the Theory of Change to maintain coherence across phases.
- Gaps and inconsistencies in monitoring data (including data related to strengthening government systems and capacity) were addressed by applying mixed methods such as contribution analysis and outcome harvesting, and by triangulating secondary data with KIIs and FGDs.
- The lack of detailed pathways for achieving gender and inclusion objectives in programme design was addressed by integrating gender and inclusion into evaluation questions, sampling, and analysis, and applying gender-sensitive protocols during data collection.
- Anticipated difficulties in accessing stakeholders during the summer and pre-election period were mitigated by conducting early interviews ahead of the main data collection phase, based on

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[66] The full evaluation methodology is presented in the inception report.

insights provided by the CO on availability. Overall stakeholder coverage through KIIs was therefore strong.

- The overall resources allocated to the evaluation for collecting primary data from programme beneficiaries were limited but given that the primary focus of the evaluation was not accountability, primary data collection of beneficiaries sought specifically to contextualize the monitoring data.

57.   WFP decentralized evaluations must conform to WFP and UNEG ethical standards and norms. The ET was responsible for safeguarding and ensuring ethics during the conduct of the evaluation. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring informed consent, protecting privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of participants, ensuring cultural sensitivity, respecting the autonomy of participants, ensuring fair recruitment of participants (including women and socially excluded groups) and ensuring that the evaluation results in no harm to participants or their communities. A structured summary of the ethical issues identified, associated risks, and the safeguards applied by the Evaluation Team during the evaluation is provided in Annex 3, including how these were monitored and managed throughout implementation.

58.   To support dissemination of the evaluation findings and WFP corporate learning, a two-page Evaluation Brief will be published to inform key stakeholders of the final product.

2. Evaluation findings

2.1. To what extent are WFP interventions relevant to meeting the needs of the vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and of the MLSP?

2.1.1 Was the design of the intervention relevant and did it remain relevant to the wider Moldovan context, the underlying structural issues underpinning vulnerability and the impact of the influx of refugees?

Finding 1.   WFP programmes and activities were largely appropriate and adaptive to the Moldovan context. The organisation's emergency expertise enabled the rapid and effective delivery of cash assistance to vulnerable population groups. The decision to align cash-based transfers with government systems was sound, and efforts to enhance the efficiency of delivery chains further strengthened programme relevance. However, some stakeholders questioned the appropriateness of WFP's engagement in broader policy and programme reforms.

59.   The decision to establish a WFP presence in March 2022 was a response to a major emergency that overwhelmed the country's capacity to respond. The impact of the war in Ukraine and refugee influx into Moldova compounded pre-existing economic vulnerabilities and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the already ongoing energy crisis.[67] Prior to the Ukraine crisis, poverty rates had already increased by seven percentage points between 2021 and 2022.

60.   Moldova has been among the countries most affected by the spillover effects of the war in Ukraine, and the refugee influx that followed. By the end of the second month of the emergency, more than 430,000 refugees had entered Moldova although many of them then transited to other countries (see Figure 6 in section 1.2.2). Starting with the first weeks of the crisis, Moldova had one of the highest ratios of refugees per capita from Ukraine. This represented close to four percent of Moldova's population and the influx seriously stretched local response capacities.[68] Inter-agency assessments[69] and interviews with informants confirmed that, while the Government made tremendous efforts to respond to the crisis, it struggled to meet all needs given financial and human resource limitations. Furthermore, while civil society organizations were amongst the first responders, they lacked the capacity to respond at scale.[70]

61.   In a context of rapidly mounting humanitarian needs, WFP's core humanitarian expertise and widely recognized ability to quickly deliver cash at scale were a strong added value. The government was unprepared for an influx of such magnitude and struggling to open sufficient RACs at very short notice. WFP provided both food to refugees in the RACs and through support to RHHs alleviated the pressure on RAC accommodation.

62.   **The impact of the war in Ukraine and refugee influx into Moldova was compounded by the pre-existing economic vulnerabilities.** Consequently the 2022 RRP reflected the broad consensus among partners on the need for international support to refugee hosting and generally to[71]vulnerable Moldovan households. Furthermore, given the delicate political context in Moldova there was a shared concern between Government and development partners on the potential impacts of the refugee influx on social cohesion and on social stability in general. Several stakeholders confirmed early perceptions that refugees were receiving disproportionate support compared with poor Moldovans.[72] Data collected later in 2022 for

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[67] UNDP (2022). Project Document. Implementation of the EVRF. SKM_C227_1s22122815450

[68] UNHCR (2022).

[69] See Finding 6.

[70] KIIs NGOs

[71] UNHCR (2022).

[72] SeeD (2022)

the 2022 for the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index[73] which found that food security was one of the determinants of social cohesion, albeit not the most important one.[74] Therefore, targeting support to vulnerable Moldovans, including EFA and CVM transfers, was justified in both meeting needs and contributing towards promoting social cohesion between refugees and the host community.

63.   WFP commissioned an in-depth analysis of Moldova's food system in 2023. While the food system in Moldova faces systemic inefficiencies, the analysis concluded that WFP's comparative advantage does not lie in this space, because of the presence of specialized actors such as Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), legislative complexity, and functional market and trade systems. As a result, WFP decided not to pursue technical assistance in the food system sector in the ICSP.[75]

64.   **WFP appropriately decided to implement the CVM programme through government structures**, working closely with MLSP from the outset.[76] This approach reflected Moldova's upper-middle income country (UMIC) status and the relative strength of its national systems, and was widely endorsed by stakeholders. From the very beginning, WFP's direct assistance was implemented in close collaboration with government systems, creating opportunities not only to leverage national platforms for delivery but also to make a sustainable contribution to improving their operation. One donor stakeholder stated that "*we had an opportunity to contribute towards leaving national systems in a better place to respond to future crises than when we arrived*". Given the entry point of supporting cash transfers, the obvious counterpart Ministry for implementation and system-strengthening was the MLSP. WFP analysis identified key challenges within the Ministry, including the lack of integrated management information systems and limited technical capacities and human resources, and developed capacity-building activities to boost the efficiency of the Ajutor Social[77] programme.[78]Building on this operational entry point, WFP's ambition extended beyond improving the efficiency of delivery systems to influencing policy and programme design in partnership with development actors, including expanding the coverage of national systems, improving support for poverty affected households, and leveraging the national social protection system to meet the needs of crisis affected populations. However, this broader role was questioned by some internal and external stakeholders, who raised concerns about WFP's relevance in this space and its added value compared to established development actors, particularly given that systemic change is a long-term development process.

65.   The refugee influx peaked in first months after the full-scale invasion in February 2022 and started to decline in the second half of 2022. In this context, WFP has been adapting its programming by actively preparing to transition responsibilities to the Government and other United Nations agencies in view of their planned exit from the country. **However, the overall situation remains unstable in the region, with considerable uncertainty about the outcome of the continued war in Ukraine and a new refugee influx.** Following the January 2025 gas supply crisis in the left bank there are widespread concerns that a similar crisis in the 2025-2026 winter could pose more acute challenges to this autonomous region, including the ability to meet civil servant salaries and social benefits payments, including pensions. WFP has been active in the UNCT contributing to contingency planning. The overall humanitarian context and the risks of multiple future crises suggested that the shock-responsiveness of national systems needed to be strengthened.

66.   The T-ICSP and ICSP were both designed in a period that benefitted from context-specific generous donor support. However, the funding context in Moldova has become more challenging going forward, with a steep reduction in funding of humanitarian assistance towards the Ukraine regional crisis, including Moldova, reflecting both changes in needs and a global reduction in funds (see Figure 18).

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[73] SeeD (2022)

[74] SeeD & WFP (2022)

[75] WFP (2023d).

[76] UNHCR (2022b).

[77] Ajutor Social is the cash transfer of last resort for poor households designed to Guarantee Minimum Incomes to households.

[78] WFP (2023c).

Figure 18 Trends in Reported Humanitarian Funding for Moldova
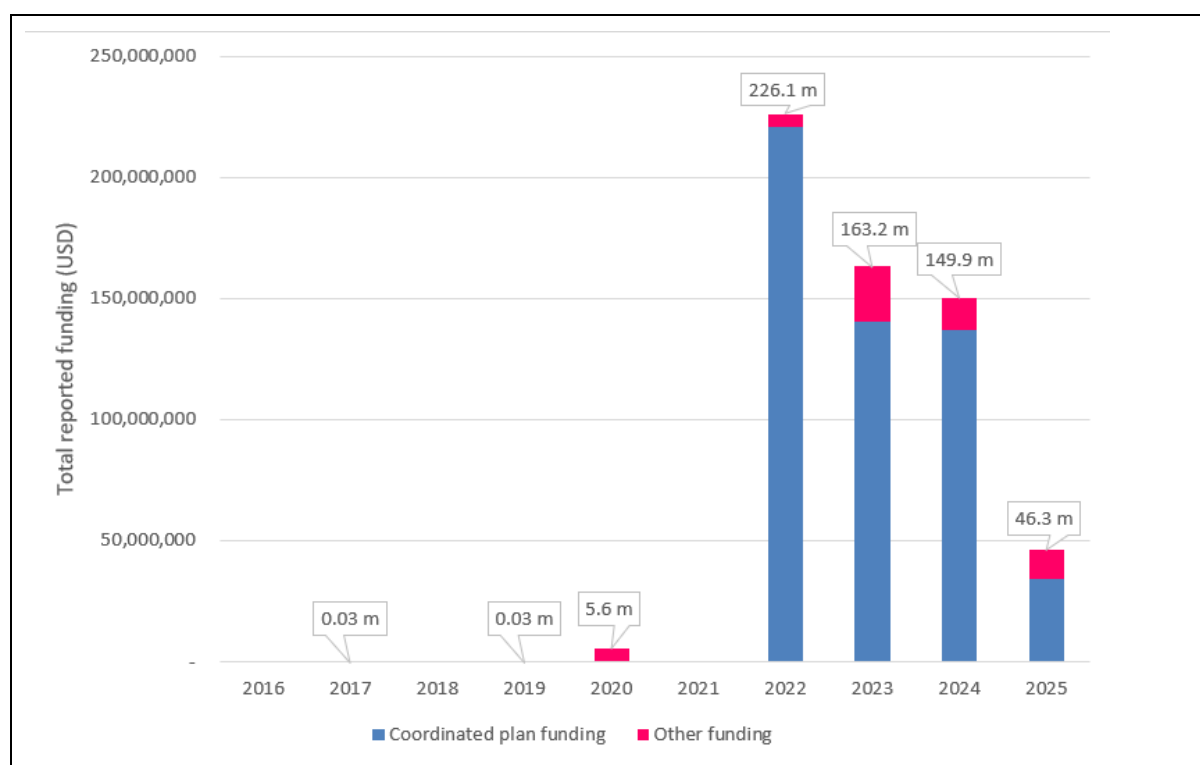
Source: ET, UNOCHA, 2025

67. Global funding pressures form a key context for the draft WFP Strategic Plan for 2026–2029.[79] This Plan acknowledges an unprecedented funding crisis, impacting WFP and its partners in the United Nations system and an expectation that these funding cuts will last. Dwindling funding has coincided with an increasing volume and complexity of crises and conflicts, emphasising the need for increased efficiency United Nations agencies. Concerns over declining funding levels are also reflected in the 2024 CSP prioritization guidelines.[80] These guidelines encourage COs to plan and mobilize more closely aligned to their capacity, ability, and resources, and enable WFP to put forward more realistic asks to donors and enhance confidence in WFP's planning and delivery capacity.[81]

68. As highlighted in the new WFP strategic plan "Strengthening national systems has gained further importance as a means for WFP to enable a sustainable response at scale" and "working through national systems has empowered governments to lead, paving the way for a gradual transition and responsible phase-out of WFP's direct implementation where appropriate".[82] Both of these considerations are central to the Moldova approach.

2.1.2 To what extent did the intervention plan to address the specific needs and priorities of refugees and vulnerable Moldovans?

Finding 2. **WFP grounded its response in multiple assessments coordinated with government and UN partners, making an early and contextually appropriate decision to adopt an exclusively**

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[79] WFP (2025). Strategic Plan. Draft 1 for Consultation.
[80] WFP. Calibrating our ambition: guidelines to formulate focused Country Strategic Plans and develop realistic Country Portfolio Needs and Budgets. October 2024.
[81] Although it is noted that these guidelines largely support planning of transfers and remain largely silent on planning of capacity strengthening activities.
[82] WFP (2025a).

cash-based approach. While targeting was broadly justified by available vulnerability indicators, gaps remained due to the lack of tailored analysis for refugee-hosting households and limited consideration of gender-specific needs.

69.   Planning of the WFP response to the influx of refugees in 2022 was informed by close consultation with the Government, UNHCR, and other United Nations partners, based on joint assessments and community consultations. Support to RACs drew on this overall understanding of needs for refugees in Moldova, and WFP supplemented this by conducting FGDs and routine monitoring with refugees in RACs to gather their feedback on the meals served and assess their satisfaction of the support provided, which led to changes in the food menu.[83]

70.   Subsequent rental market assessments were also conducted by REACH[84] Moldova.[85] The findings demonstrated the particular barriers to affordable accommodation solutions for refugees in Moldova and demonstrated the need for supporting access to accommodation with people with mobility disabilities.[86] WFP informants confirmed that this analysis helped inform the initial design of the cash-based response to RHHs, with the objective of increasing the supply of refugee accommodation. However, a specific assessment dedicated to the needs of RHHs was not conducted, and a blanket approach was applied to targeting these households, which did not consider differential vulnerability of RHHs. WFP management argued that this was due to limited technical capacity and the need for an initial urgent response. However, no assessment was done in the following years.

71.   **WFP made the contextually appropriate and strategically important early choice of an exclusively CBT-based response**, in close coordination with the other humanitarian partners, particularly UNHCR and members of the Cash Working Group (CWG)[87]. This was relevant in Moldova's context, where food access, rather than food availability, is the main challenge to food security and where close to 40 percent of Moldovan household expenditures were estimated to be used for food.[88] WFP and partner assessments confirmed that Moldova had functioning markets, that made the use of the CBT modality feasible.[89]

72.   An early market assessment was conducted by UNHCR in 2022, based on a desk-based analysis, with a subsequent market assessment completed in October 2023,[90] confirming that needs could be met by cash transfers. In addition, an early multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) was conducted in May 2022[91] within the Regional Refugee Response, with a subsequent MSNA conducted in early 2023.[92] The 2022 MSNA demonstrated that for hosted refugees, as well as those within RACs, cash assistance was the primary need, followed by food (see Figure 19 below).[93] However, 98 percent of households responding to the 2023 MSNA reported an acceptable food consumption score.[94]

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[83] WFP (2022a)

[84] REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT), and facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery, and development contexts.

[85] REACH Moldova (2023); REACH Moldova (2024)

[86] Ibid.

[87] The CWG includes representatives from government, United Nations Agencies (including WFP), NGOs, and organizations providing monitoring services.

[88] Moldova National Bureau of Statistics (2025)

[89] Key informant interviews; UNHCR (2023)

[90] UNHCR (2023b)

[91] REACH Moldova (2022)

[92] The assessments were conducted by REACH Moldova and led by UNICEF and UNHCR with the support of other humanitarian and development actors active in the response, including WFP. All REACH assessments for Moldova can be found here: Resource Centre | Impact

[93] Ibid.

[94] REACH Moldova (2023b)

Figure 19 Top five reported needs by type of accommodation[95], 2022
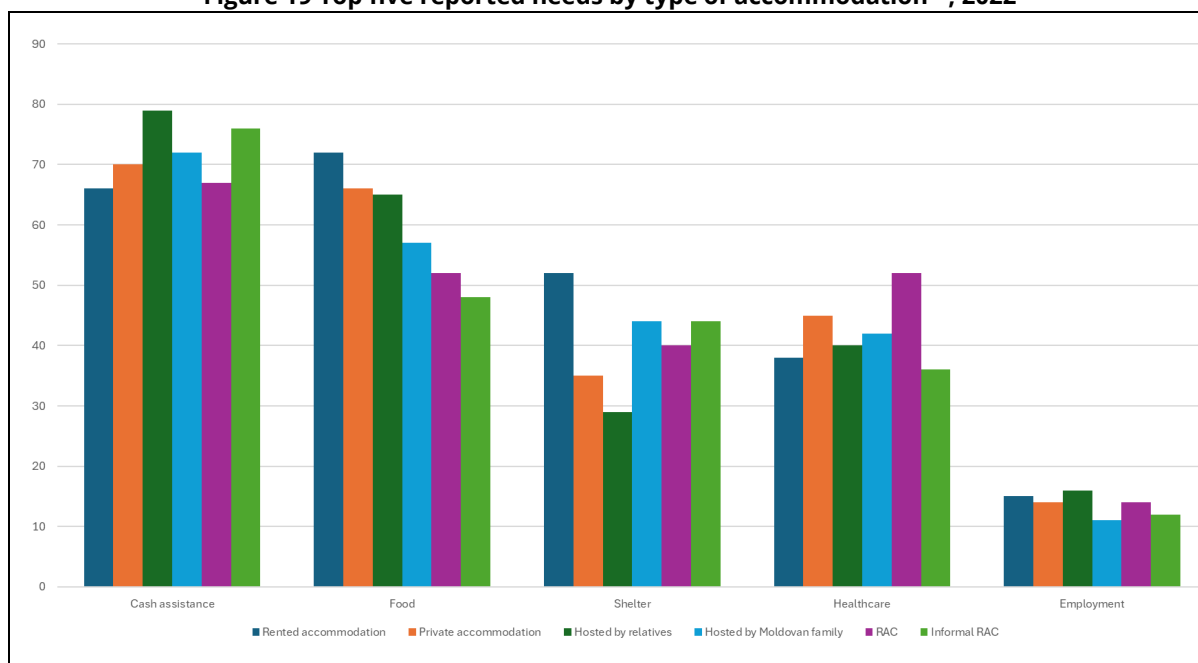
Sources: REACH Moldova (2022)

73.	The initial decision to support the local population through the EFA/CVM programme was based on national data on high levels of poverty incidence prior to the conflict. Data showed the share of the population with incomes below the national poverty line increasing from 21 percent in 2021 to 31 percent in 2022, with particular vulnerabilities amongst the elderly, families with three or more children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, and single-parent households.[96] Data also showed the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity was 24.9 percent in 2020-2021, which was three-times higher than the average in EU countries (7.4 percent).[97] The understanding of these specific vulnerabilities and high needs, alongside an emphasis on mitigating food and energy price inflation and the risk of social tensions as a result of the refugee influx, was used as the initial justification for the collective response by MLSP and United Nations agencies. This was followed by an in-depth vulnerability analysis to inform the social assistance targeting and support an evidence-based discussion on coverage needs later in the response.[98]

74.	A first multi-agency General Population Needs Assessment was conducted by IOM and WFP between November 2023 and January 2024,[99] with a second round[100] conducted from June 2024.[101] These assessments provided an overview of the unique challenges faced by the Moldovan population. The initial assessment showed that 19 percent of the respondents were classified as moderately/severely food insecure with an additional 32 percent of the respondents as marginally food insecure. Informants noted that these assessments had been used to confirm MLSP vulnerability criteria and priorities, with a particular need to focus on households with severe disabilities, households with children with severe disabilities, and the elderly. WFP monitoring data subsequently confirmed the vulnerability of beneficiary households (see Figure 20).

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[95] An informal RAC is a collective centre which is not under the oversight and management of ANAS. 'Hosted by Moldovan family' refers to refugees accommodated by Moldovan households, while 'hosted by relatives' refers to those hosted by their own relatives already residing in Moldova.

[96] WFP (2023g)

[97] Ibid.

[98] WFP & IOM (2024a)

[99] Ibid.

[100] WFP & IOM (2024b)

[101] Subsequent rounds of the assessment have not been disseminated due to USAID funding cuts.

Figure 20 Proportion of households relying on livelihood coping strategies for food security, 2023

1%
28%
47%
24%

2023 PDM

■ Not adopting LCS ■ Stress ■ Crisis ■ Emergency
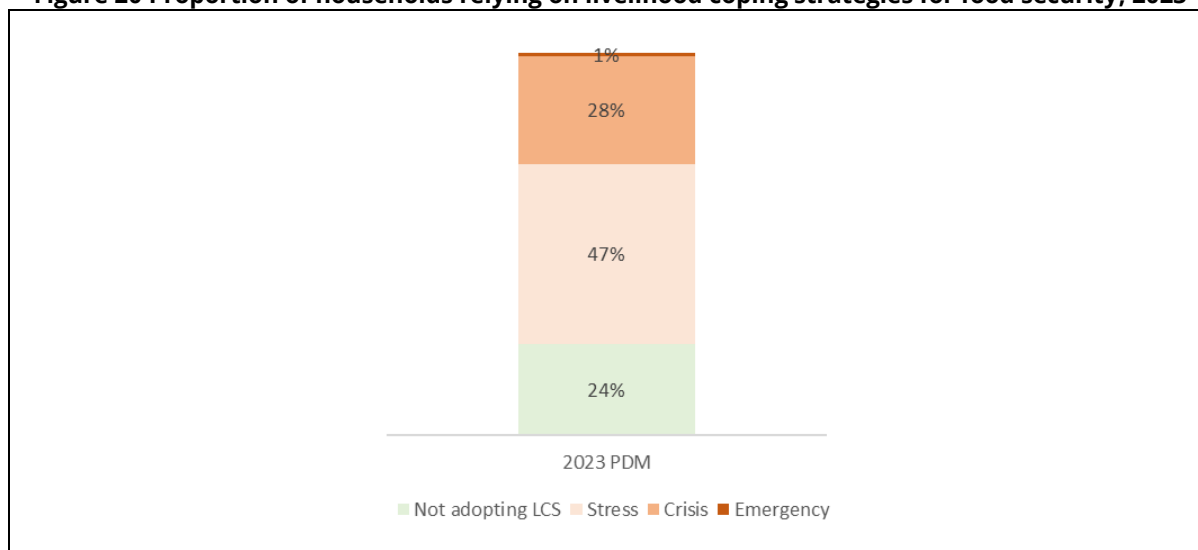
75.   The refugee response was also shaped by Moldova's political and geographical context rather than absolute levels of food insecurity. Design parameters were chosen in a way that reflected what donors were willing to fund and meant that the threshold for the response was not calibrated against global benchmarks. The estimation of numbers in need of assistance was not based on a globally comparable assessment such as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification or agreed alternative such as the WFP Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators methodology.[102] Stakeholders accepted that while pressing needs were evident in Moldova, the absolute levels of food insecurity compared favorably with other major global crises.

76.   **Cash transfers were also designed with the objective of mitigating social tensions**. A 2023 assessment by WFP and the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development[103] found that while Moldovan citizens attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees were more positive than negative, a multi-sectoral response that supports both local and refugee populations could positively influence attitudes towards refugees.

77.   The ET found limited evidence that WFP had used gender analysis to inform the design of interventions. Interviews with WFP staff confirmed that there was no separate gender and inclusion analysis at the design stage. Donors noted that while gender mainstreaming requirements were formally met, the design relied more on general vulnerability categories than on specific analysis of underlying drivers of gender vulnerability.

2.1.3 How well was the intervention designed to address the relevant needs and priorities of the MLSP supported by WFP?

Finding 3.   WFP built strong trust with MLSP and refined its system-strengthening offer to align with national priorities. However, political sensitivities and differing expectations—particularly around Ajutor Social expansion and social canteens—meant only parts of this offer could be developed as agreements with MLSP.

78.   **Developing agreement with the MLSP on system-strengthening was challenging** given that WFP had no previous presence in-country, lacked visibility with the local authorities and was unclear about the duration of its presence. A considerable investment was made in developing a system-strengthening strategy drawing on a number of missions by HQ and Regional Office Temporary Duty (TDY) staff and the

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[102] As reported in the methodology used by the Global Food Crisis Report (see technical notes https://www.fsinplatform.org/report/global-report-food-crises-2024/).
[103] SeeD & WFP (2022).

expertise of CO staff (Figure 25). These identified a menu of possible "offers" of system-strengthening to MLSP.

79. Stakeholders suggested that some of the earliest ideas were perhaps overly orientated towards attempting to replicate successful WFP interventions from other countries.[104] However, over time the system-strengthening approach evolved to blend an analysis of the specific needs of the national system with WFP's mandate and added-value. Given the anticipated limited duration of its presence, WFP sought to identity activities that could be completed within a relatively short time horizon and implemented in partnership with development actors with a longer-term commitment to carrying forward the work with Government.

80. **Overall, the WFP CO approach was lauded for a humility and willingness to listen to Government**, with "*a conceptualization of government ownership from start*". This was positively contrasted with a tendency witnessed elsewhere where WFP tended to design operations first and only later consider handover to Government.[105]

81. Regular and open communication was identified as critical in building WFP's understanding of MLSP's system-strengthening needs. Strong relationships were established at a senior level between the WFP leadership and the two MLSP Ministers over the period of implementation. This set the tone for conducive relationships at the technical level between WFP and MLSP colleagues. The profiles of WFP staff contributed to relationship building and drew on experience gained from work for or with Governments in other countries amongst key WFP staff at the CO, regional and HQ levels. This allowed WFP staff involved in system-strengthening to draw on experience with an understanding of Government processes, opportunities and constraints.[106]

82. On the side of the MLSP there was an evident openness to capitalize on technical and financial assistance from United Nations agencies. While the initial MLSP interest may have focused on receiving material support for RACs and vulnerable Moldovans, both MLSP Ministers demonstrated a keen interest in the potential technical contribution of WFP. MLSP had clearly identified capacity gaps and needs – as demonstrated by the RESTART agenda (see Finding 4). At the time of WFP's establishment, the MLSP had recently separated from the Ministry of Health and sought support to establish its capacities.

83. A continuous dialogue occurred with MLSP to reach agreement and the design of some system-strengthening activities. Prior to implementation, a MoU was signed between WFP and MLSP on the scope of specific system-strengthening activities. This ensured clarity on the priorities and constituted a formal agreement on the side of Government.

84. **However, reaching agreement on system-strengthening activities required differing strategic priorities to be reconciled.** WFP identified the Ajutor Social Programme as a primary focus of its dual-purpose system-strengthening efforts. However, a lack of political support for Ajutor Social ultimately limited agreement to a narrow focus of strengthening the efficiency of delivery chains, rather than extending coverage (see Finding 17).

85. There was little immediate appetite in MLSP for investing in SRSP given their unfamiliarity with the concept. MLSP leadership indicated that priorities of pursuing the RESTART reforms, dealing with the refugee crisis and the EU accession process gave them little additional "bandwidth" to discuss SRSP. However, interest in SRSP was reignited following changes in the national crisis management framework during the past year, advocacy by WFP and other partners including UNICEF and a large-scale fire in Durlesti on the outskirts of Chisinau in May 2025. MLSP found that it was ill-prepared to respond and requested financial and technical support from WFP. Subsequently an MoU was signed between WFP and the MLSP to pursue further engagement on SRSP (see Finding 16).

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[104] WFP KIIs
[105] WFP KIIs
[106] Notably one of the technical staff who provided TDY support on developing the digitalization strategy had previously been a deputy minister of planning in another government in the region.

86.   Support was explicitly requested from WFP by the Government to strengthen the social canteens / social food services run by government.[107] However, WFP and MLSP appeared to have somewhat differing objectives. WFP saw social canteens as a potential exit strategy from providing hot meals to the RACs and as a contingency for future refugee influxes, providing expertise in areas such as food standards, logistics and supply chains.[108] For Government social canteens provided an important community service for the elderly which goes beyond the provision of food and combatted loneliness and social isolation. The MLSP priorities for support included reconstruction and civil works, areas where WFP lacked the budget, specific expertise or the necessary time to take such activities to completion. Given these different perspectives agreement was not reached on a full programme of system-strengthening for these facilities.

2.2. How coherent have WFP interventions been with broader social protection policies and programmes in Moldova and how has WFP ensured synergies between its CBT and social protection capacity strengthening support?

2.2.1 How well has WFP's social protection intervention aligned with the national social protection policies and reforms of the Government of Moldova implemented by the MLSP and other partners?

Finding 4.   Government reforms, particularly through RESTART, provided a clear framework that enabled WFP to align effectively with national priorities—especially in digitalization, assurance, and human resource strengthening. Agreement on system-strengthening outside established formal policy priorities advanced more slowly.

87.   Government reforms (see Box 1) provided a clear statement of Government priorities for WFP and other partners to align activities against. RESTART constituted an extensive reform of the MLSP social assistance systems and programmes which focuses on the reform of social services rather than social transfers. However, elements of RESTART also targeted the building blocks of both programmes traversing all social assistance programmes. There is a particularly clear alignment of WFP's work with the Government agenda around result areas (3) and (4) of the RESTART reform: the development of the MLSP human resources and digital infrastructure. Aspects of the WFP system-strengthening efforts directly supported the goal of reducing inclusion errors in Ajutor Social, including through the work on the assurance of cash transfers, strengthening the work of the Social Inspectorate and the development of the Ajutor Social performance and risk dashboards.

88.   With so many active development partners and NGOs willing to support RESTART – MLSP reported up 64 partners – a strong coordination function was important to avoiding overlaps. A RESTART coordinator embedded in the MLSP provided a key platform for actively coordinating contributions from a wide range of development partners and was initially funded by WFP (see Finding 19). A dedicated RESTART digitalisation coordinator coordinated support to the launch of a modern digital single window for service delivery (which WFP contributed to through under the leadership of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)[109] and the effective utilization of systems and data to enhance accountability and improve planning and performance management.[110] RESTART targets related to the reduction of fraud are reflected in the WFP digitisation agenda in support of Ajutor Social and the risk reduction work supported at the Social

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[107] The social canteens are a long-established part of Moldova's national social protection system which are managed and funded at the municipality / village level.
[108] WFP KII.
[109] UNDP led the eSocial initiative to merge the 15 existing MIS under a single window for the MLSP (see Finding 7)
[110] The digitization efforts are further aligned with the 2030 Digital Transformation Strategy the Moldovan government, which falls under the leadership of The Ministry of Economic Planning and Digitalization, and the e-government reform project. These further create a favourable environment for supporting the digitalisation of the processes for running the social assistance programmes. (WFP, 2023f)

Inspectorate. The RESTART coordinator also brokered requests from Government staff for training with offers from the various United Nations agencies including WFP.

89.	A key component of RESTART was the centralization of social services to ensure more consistent standards across the country and improve system efficiency. This required significant legislative work and the transfer of nearly 10,000 staff and assets at the start of 2024. Territorial Agencies of Social Assistance (ATAS) have been created, and new staff hired as an intermediate layer to manage two to four Territorial STAS. The MLSP noted and appreciated the specific contribution of WFP to this highly challenging process. This has involved contracting public finance and legal experts to assist with the transfer of assets and staff.

90.	**However, several of the key system-strengthening activities fell outside of the RESTART reforms**. RESTART focussed on supporting social services, rather than social assistance, and the RESTART agenda did not include a specific goal or target related to increasing the shock responsiveness of the system. Overall, there was a noticeably faster rate of progress in system-strengthening activities that coincided with priorities articulated in Government policy (Finding 9).

91.	Until very recently, several policy and strategy instruments were lacking in the DRM sector and refugee inclusion in Moldova (see section 0) which constrained the development of associated system-strengthening activities. This has changed recently, most notably the Law on the Management of Crisis Situations introduced, among many other new structures and concepts, the idea of a national risk assessment, of integration of sectoral and national risk assessments in contingency planning, of a national plan for crisis management and of a mechanism for quick registration, verification and financial support.[111] Ultimately the contribution of MLSP to disasters, alongside the roles of other Ministries, will need to be integrated within this national mechanism.

92.	The key planning document framing refugee inclusion is the Government decision 285/2025, which approved in May the National Programme on the Phased Integration of Foreigners in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2025-2027, including an Action Plan with timelines and estimated budgets and sources of funding.[112] The second and seventh objectives of this Action Plan are of direct interest for WFP, as they include direct references to the UAHelp platform for refugee-hosting households registration, the continued functionality and efficiency of mechanisms for the cash for refugee-hosting households and CVM programmes with an expectation to be funded by external donors until the end of 2026.[113] Informants were generally in agreement that the key barrier for the Government to implement refugee inclusion measures was budget availability, rather than policy, and WFP has aligned activities to address this (Finding 15).

2.2.2 How complementary have WFP-designed CBT and social protection actions been to each other over the course of WFP presence in Moldova from the opening of the Country Office until preparations for responsible exit?

**Finding 5.	As a new actor in Moldova, WFP established credibility through the rapid and effective delivery of cash-based transfers. Aligning with the national social protection system helped strengthen relationships and enabled WFP to gain a clearer understanding of the system's strengths and weaknesses. This, in turn, informed the design and tailoring of its system-strengthening activities.**

93.	As a new actor in Moldova, the ability of WFP to demonstrate its comparative advantage with respect to other United Nations agencies in delivering cash assistance was critical for supporting WFP to establish itself as a credible partner to the Government. Through the rapid mobilization of cash assistance at the start of the crisis, WFP demonstrated to the Government of Moldova that it had relevant experience that the Government could benefit from as part of broader social protection reforms. The scale of WFP support through direct transfers also gave WFP political currency and an important entry point for the delivery chain system-strengthening activities. WFP informants noted that by providing the Government with critical

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[111] Parliament of Moldova. (2025). WFP comments contributed to the inclusion of a clause on registration, verification and financial support.
[112] Government of Moldova. (2025a).
[113] Ibid.

resources at a time of need, WFP were able to engage in sensitive topics with Government related to social protection reform. Stakeholders contrasted this with the limited influence of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) funded Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice, and Resources (STAAR) facility[114] on MLSP as they offered technical assistance without the availability of implementation funds. From the outset MoUs signed with MLSP explicitly linked the provision of CBTs with priority system-strengthening activities.

94.   WFP were also able to use the practical collaboration with MLSP in delivering cash transfers to identify lessons for improving Government systems. The Joint UN-MLSP After Action Review (AAR) (2023)[115] of the EFA project highlighted strategic priorities including the need for: training development at central and decentralized levels; key inputs into digital reforms, including the need for an interoperable information system; and the strengthening social-protection shock responsiveness, including learning on how to use AID.MD as a digital platform for shock response with the potential of managing pooled fundings from donors and the Government of Moldova.

95.   Under the ICSP, the intention of WFP to contribute to the strategic priorities that came out from the AAR is evident. Specifically, the Social Protection Offer of WFP 2024-2026[116] explicitly notes the need to build on learning from the EFA response to input into digitalization reforms of MLSP and explore opportunities for interoperability and linkages between Ministry databases for referrals and access to services. Although final results are not yet visible, WFP has signed a MoU with the MLSP to pilot a digital module for SRSP in 2025, building on the existing AID.MD platform which for a while coordinated the quick and successful response to the Ukraine crisis.[117]

96.   WFP has also used the delivery of emergency cash transfers in response to the Durlesti fire as a pilot to test the use as part of the shock-responsive social protection. A one-off emergency cash transfer was distributed in partnership with MLSP to 165 households affected by a fire in May 2024. This pilot enabled WFP and MLSP to learn lessons in relation to a rapid emergency response and to inform technical assistance in developing a national led shock-responsive social protection system capable of responding to both local and national crises. A key recommendation from the pilot was the importance of accelerating the introduction of the SRSP digital module.[118]

97.   WFP also drew on its corporate Cash Assurance Framework (2022) to initiate an end-to-end review[119], following a request from the Minister of Labour and Social Protection to draw on WFP's corporate expertise to improve transparency, accountability, performance and cost-efficiencies in the national social cash-payment systems. The review conducted in 2023 determined key risks in MLSP's payment systems, particularly in light of MLSP concerns over data inaccuracies linked to system limitations. This review contributed to developing the WFP technical assistance on risk prevention,[120] as well as various deliverables under system-strengthening support to Ajutor Social,[121] but first a detailed business process mapping of Ajutor Social[122] was required to provide further granularity and specific recommendations to strengthen the delivery chain.

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[114] The FCDO STAAR facility is dedicated to improving the effectiveness of social protection in crises, with a focus on climate change and gender-responsive approaches. STAAR provides expert technical assistance, advice, and resources to practitioners, supporting the development and implementation of social protection policies and programs in fragile and crisis-affected contexts.
[115] WFP (2023g)
[116] WFP (2024d)
[117] WFP & MLSP (2025)
[118] WFP (2025b)
[119] WFP (2023i)
[120] WFP (2024h)
[121] Including the Ajutor Social Dashboard and a reconciliation module for Ajutor Social.
[122] WFP (2024g)

2.2.3 What have been the synergies between WFP interventions, UNSDCF and the government-UN refugee response managed under the Refugee Coordination Model?

Finding 6. **The Moldova response represented a strong example of inter-agency cooperation. Coordination mechanisms under the UNSDCF and RRP functioned effectively, and WFP played a notable role in leading these platforms. Collaboration was facilitated by limited competition for resources, constructive working relationships, and clear government leadership.**

98.   **The immediate priority for WFP was ensuring coordination on the provision of direct assistance.** Stakeholders cited coordination between WFP and UNHCR as an example of good practice. Strong coordination was promoted by an early agreement that UNHCR would provide cash transfers to refugees, while WFP would provide vouchers for hot meals to refugees housed in the RACs and cash assistance to vulnerable Moldovans impacted by the Ukrainian crisis.[123] This arrangement was noted by stakeholders as mutually beneficial, given the limitations on donor resources provided to the respective organisations. UNHCR also provided leadership in advocating for the inclusion of refugees within national social services with WFP and other United Nations agencies playing a supportive role.[124]

99.   At an operational level WFP cooperated with UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on cash transfers, and jointly signed an agreement with MLSP in November 2022 on the delivery of CVM. WFP was instrumental in bringing these agencies together under a common agreement.[125] Each agency provided funds to support EFA distributions, with the actual distributions managed by WFP. Within this overall framework each agency was able to target caseloads of specific interest - for example UNFPA targeted pregnant and lactating women and UNICEF families with more than three children. This was organised as an integrated refugee response approach targeting refugees and vulnerable Moldovans, with WFP playing the leading role for Moldovans and with the overall Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance response across different populations groups coordinated by the CWG with deduplication facilitated by the WFP development of AID.MD. WFP also collaborated with IOM on conducting the supporting annual needs assessment of vulnerable Moldovans. This allowed a much more coherent and efficient response and avoided establishing inefficient parallel cash transfer distributions, as observed in other crises.[126]

100.   Five agencies participated in the first round of distributions, while in subsequent years the number of partners and funds has declined due mostly to budget constraints and evolving agency response strategies.[127] The significance of these partnerships is witnessed by the fact that United Nations agencies provided 10 percent of the total funds to WFP over the evaluation period. The EFA was able to reach 56,000 households - or 8 percent of the Moldovan population - during the 2022-2023 winter period.[128]

101.   **As WFP pivoted towards system-strengthening at the end of 2022, the nature and range of partnerships has adapted.** Many of arrangements were formalised through jointly agreed Statements of Intent and MoUs (see Annex 9). Training of MLSP and associated government staff, an early system-strengthening activity, was conducted in close concert with other United Nations agencies. WFP funded and supported the logistics of the delivery of GBV and data management trainings of social workers, and as well as incentives for social workers, UNFPA provided the facilitators and supported the development of the technical curricula.

102.   Cooperation was also critical in supporting the digitalization of MLSP systems. UNDP had a well-established role in leading the digitalization of public administration in cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization. As part of this larger role UNDP had taken responsibility for digitalization in social protection to update and unify the 14 pre-existing management information systems (MIS) under a single "eSocial" window. UNDP welcomed the WFP support on analysing the 14 MLSP MIS and

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[123] This division was confirmed through a jointly signed statement of intent between the two agencies.
[124] WFP (2023c)
[125] WFP and UN KIIs
[126] WFP and United Nations agency KIIs
[127] In the second year IOM and UNFPA and third year only IOM continued to fund WFP. UN agency KIIs.
[128] WFP, 2023a

on its specific work on the 'Sistemul Informaţional Automatizat 'Asistenţă Socială' (SIAAS) database, UAHelp and AID.MD, as its own resources were stretched in supporting digitalization nationally. UNDP leadership ensured a clear pathway for the handover and continuation of WFP system-strengthening efforts at the point when the ICSP has ended.[129] This allowed WFP to also do the analysis of the SIAAS database, used for Ajutor Social.

103. There was on-going consultation and collaboration with UNICEF and UNDP including as part of the Technical Assistance Project Steering Committee. However, UNICEF had only committed to work on adjusting the legal framework for 2025 and UNDP had limited capacity to work on this in 2025. A more recent MoU in relation to SRSP was concluded between WFP and MLSP could have helped to concretise areas of collaboration/ articulation on SRSP.

104. Specific partnerships in relationship to advocating for wider coverage of the Ajutor Social programme were limited. UNICEF has continued to support Ajutor Social with a specific focus on child poverty from a policy, rather than technical perspective. UNICEF previously supported analysis to raise the case for increasing the coverage of the Ajutor Social programme[130] and more recently conducted an analysis of the fiscal space for social protection.[131] While the World Bank was the initiator of Ajutor Social, it has not prioritized support to the mechanism over the 2022–2024 period. In 2025, UNICEF and the World Bank supported together the integration of Ajutor Social with additional services, such as social services, employment services and family-friendly policies, using case management as a key tool.

105. **Coordination was pursued and enabled through a wide array of formal and informal coordination mechanisms**. The 2023-2027 UNSDCF constituted the framework for organizing development coordination under the leadership of the Government and the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC), while humanitarian coordination for the refugee crisis falls under the refugee coordination mechanism led by the Government together with UNHCR, which coordinates work done within the framework of RRP. Differences in levels of funding and numbers of participating agencies resulted in different dynamics within the mechanisms for the RRP and UNSDCF. Since the beginning of the crisis the RRPs, in which only nine United Nations agencies participated, received more than USD 775 million. With 22 participating United Nations agencies, the UNSDCF space is more crowded, for only USD 150 million mobilized.

106. Under the refugee coordination mechanism between 2022 to 2024, WFP coordinated primarily their direct assistance, leading the Food Security Working Sub-Group and participating in the UNHCR and MLSP co-led CWG and Basic Needs Working Group. Stakeholders commented that WFP's strong leadership in the food security working group was ultimately less relevant given the emphasis on cash and the need for coordination in this area.

107. With the move away from reliance on humanitarian aid to government-led response and new refugee inclusion indicators in the UNSDCF, the structure of the Refugee Coordination Forum has been modified and simplified. Coordination has been consolidated into several new and larger groups, of which the Inclusion and Solutions Working Group (ISWG) is co-chaired by MLSP[132] with support from three rotating co-chairs, where WFP has played an important role alongside UNHCR, UNICEF and UNDP, and provided additional coordination staff to support the structure for nine months.

108. Programmes under UNSDCF in Moldova are coordinated under four result groups.[133] WFP has made a meaningful contribution by participating in all four groups with a focus on Results Group 1, where social protection is coordinated along with education and health. No separate formal social protection group

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[129] Internal and external KIIs
[130] Evans *et al* (2019).
[131] UNICEF (2025)
[132] UNHCR (2025e).
[133] The Results Group 1 coordinates programmes contributing to the just and inclusive institutions and equal opportunities for human development pillar, and is co-led by UNHCR and UNFPA. The other three results groups cover participatory governance and social cohesion, enhanced shared prosperity in a sustainable economy and green development, sustainable communities and disaster and climate resilience

has been established, but Results Group 1 occasionally meets separately on a thematic basis, including on social protection.

109. Given the number of United Nations agencies currently working with MLSP, the UNRC initiated an informal social protection group, co-chaired by WFP and UNICEF, ensuring that partners are kept informed about ongoing activities and ensuring that all proposed activities sit with a government policy instrument. Informants have been unanimous in recognizing the positive role that WFP played as a co-chair of this group.

110. It has proved challenging to establish connections between the refugee coordination mechanism and the results group coordination under UNSDCF.[134] WFP has been working, including through the ISWG and the other coordination bodies that it has been (co)-chairing, to support the transition of refugee support from the RRP to the UNSDCF, as part of its responsible exit strategy.

111. In addition to the RRP and UNSCDF coordination bodies, WFP has led the creation of an additional coordination mechanism as part of its Technical Assistance Project to strengthen UN-MLSP coordination in the areas of Ajutor Social risk management, case management, and adding shock-responsive capacity to the programme. [135] This coordination platform was welcomed by partners as helpful.

112. Several factors were identified by stakeholders as contributing to the ability to reach constructive agreement and good coordination between agencies. Clear overall Government leadership was important in framing coordination efforts. The personalities of the leaders and staff of the various agencies was noted to be a key driver. WFP leadership demonstrated a reflex to seek partnerships from the outset of activities and this was important in setting the tone of engagement by all the staff in the CO. WFP staff demonstrated positive and constructive attitudes to cooperation and partners reported that this had been consistent despite the relatively high levels of staff rotation.

113. Collectively United Nations agency leaders were strongly inclined towards interagency corporation. United Nations agencies also noted that as a high-profile crisis there was a lot of pressure to deliver quickly from the various corporate headquarters. This accelerated progress in concluding interagency agreements, particularly facilitating regional and headquarter level endorsement. For example, one stakeholder noted "*the EFA agreement was reached in weeks rather than months, which was remarkably swift even in an emergency situation*". Joint field visits between agency staff and donors were used to demonstrate joint objectives and progress. Coordination was also facilitated by ease of access - the small number of key technical staff were located in close proximity and able to meet easily and regularly, reportedly on a daily basis in the early days of the crisis.

114. WFP's presence was perceived as non-competitive with the work programmes of other partners, as the organization communicated early on that its role in Moldova was temporary. This was evidenced by deliberately maintaining low public visibility, including in the media. Furthermore, as WFP was newly established it did not carry any legacy issues or prior mandate-related tensions with other United Nations agencies.[136]

115. The relatively generous funding available was the single most important factor in enabling strong collaboration between the agencies in country. All agencies agreed that competition for resources was the biggest obstacle to strong collaboration worldwide. Several actors questioned what the impact of the declining resource availability would be on the level of interagency cooperation.

116. Coordination between agencies was not always perfect and challenges were noted. There was a structural disconnect noted between the UNSCDF coordination mechanisms, which were led by the UNRC on behalf of all United Nations agencies, compared to the single agency leadership under UNHCR of the RRP. Nor was it entirely clear the extent to which the EVRF mechanism, the largest shock responsive mechanism in the country, was coordinated with the WFP workstream on developing a national shock responsive system. Some corporate level challenges were also seen. WFP was unable to conclude a data sharing agreement with

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[134] WFP and UN KIIs.
[135] WFP (2024e).
[136] WFP KIIs

IOM to support the extended provision of RHH transfers into the left bank[137] as legal issues prevented this agreement being concluded.

2.3. To what extent have WFP 's capacity strengthening, food and cash assistance interventions been efficient to meet the needs of vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and national social protection system?

2.3.1 To what extent have WFP CBT processes been timely, secure, and accessible?

Finding 7. **WFP's CBT processes in Moldova were timely, secure and accessible, and continued to improve over time. Timeliness and predictability were widely recognised as key strengths, supported by multiple safeguards to ensure transfer integrity. Accessibility increased as delivery channels were adapted to the needs of vulnerable groups, although protection risk monitoring could have been stronger.**

117. Overall, across modalities—RACs, RHH, EFA, and CVM—timeliness and predictability of transfers were widely recognized as a strength. When WFP first entered Moldova in 2022, it had to establish operations from scratch. Despite this, the first CBT transfers to RACs were rolled out within one week of beneficiary registration and within one month of WFP's arrival; and the cash for RHH, within two weeks of registration. WFP staff and partners noted that this speed was exceptional for a new operation.

118. As can be seen in Figure 21, earlier programme cycles in 2022 under the EFA phase showed underperformance in numbers reached against targets (see Figure 21), primarily due to administrative bottlenecks, limited communication outreach, and accessibility barriers linked to the payment provider. Capacity constraints at central and local levels also contributed to slower registration and disbursement. Since 2023, WFP has exceeded targets of CBT except for 2024 when there was an under-execution of commodity voucher distribution.[138] Figure 22 further illustrates this trend, showing that implementation performance improved significantly in later cycles as coordination mechanisms and delivery systems were strengthened.

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[137] IOM is responsible for cash payments to refugees on the left bank, as UNHCR lacks an agreement with an FSP for this area.
[138] WFP provides assistance to RACs accredited by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection that requested support through commodity vouchers. There were 102 RACs in 2022 and 24 RACs were being supported as of December 2024. The reduction in number of RACs is due to reduction in number of refugees residing in RACs and RAC consolidation strategy implemented by the MLSP.

Figure 21 Planned and actual CBT (LEO, T-ICSP and CSP)
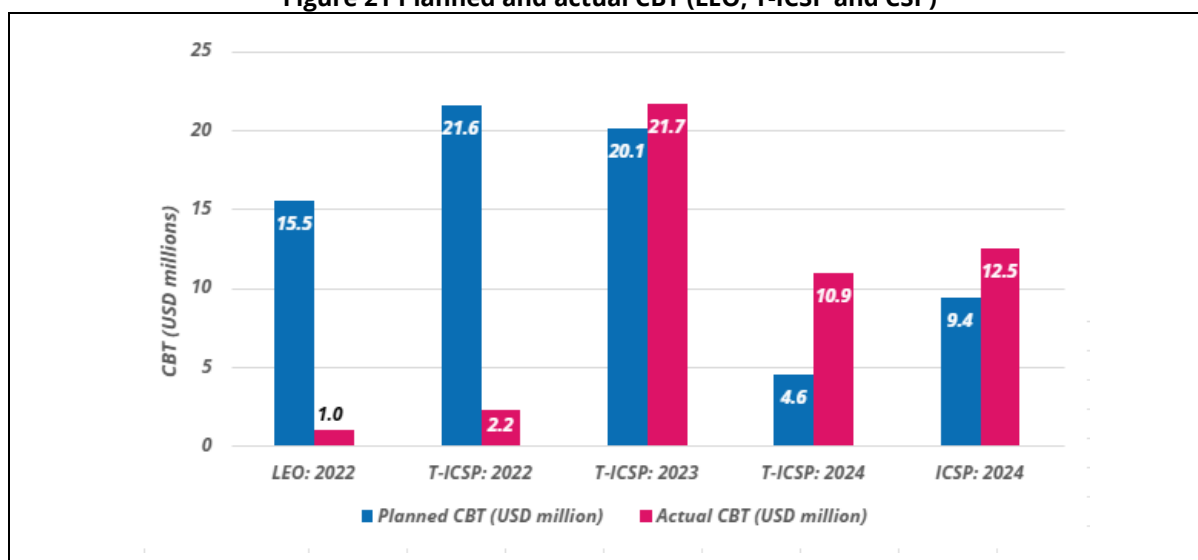
Source: COMET and WFP Ukraine (2022), Moldova ACRs 2022-2024

Figure 22 Planned and actual commodity voucher (LEO, T-ICSP and ICSP)
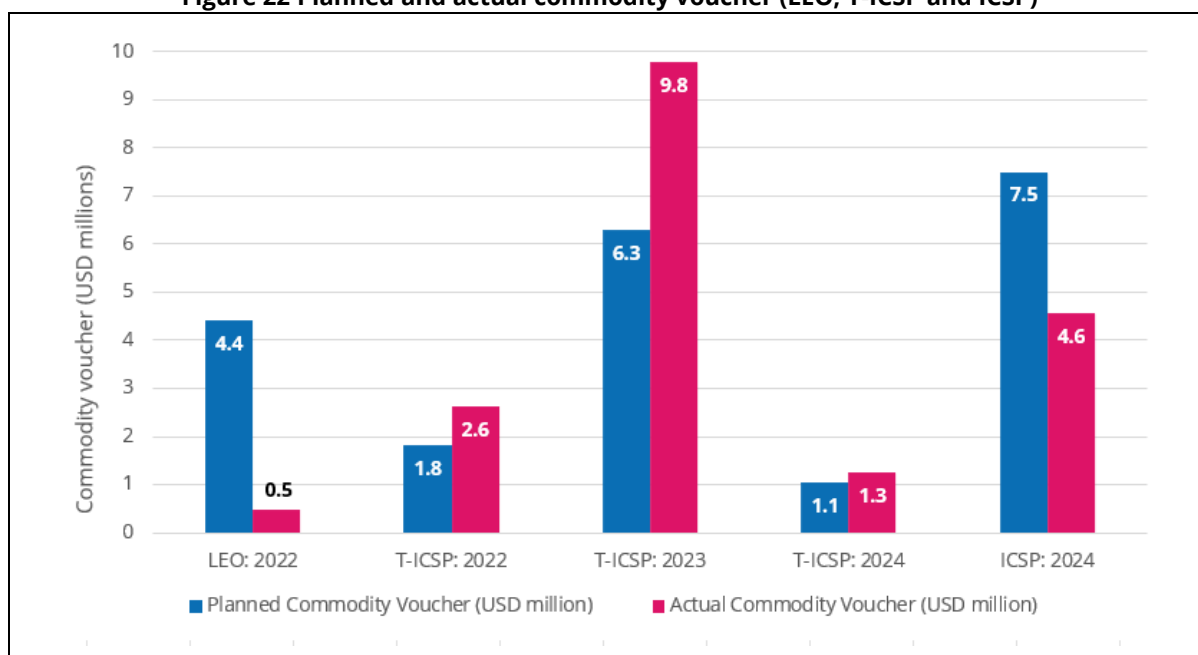
Source: COMET and WFP Ukraine (2022), Moldova ACRs 2022-2024

119.   Beneficiaries in focus groups and individual interviews confirmed that transfers were fast, regular and predictable. RHH beneficiaries recalled receiving payments bimonthly from the moment they applied, describing the support as predictable and reliable. Beneficiaries considered predictability equally important as speed, since it gave households confidence to plan their budgets in advance. A global agreement with Western Union was important to a timely start-up as this avoided the need to procure a local Financial Service Provider (FSP), while also offering WFP a significant discount.

120.   The start of the EFA programme was more difficult. The government lists provided through the AID.MD platform required heavy verification, and social assistants struggled to manage the workload. As a result, there were delays in the initial payments. Beneficiaries recalled waiting longer than expected, which was stressful during the peak of the energy crisis. WFP and MLSP responded by redesigning the programme

into a one-off seasonal transfer of MDL 4,900. Monitoring later confirmed that this lump-sum approach was more useful for families to manage winter costs than smaller, staggered payments.[139]

121.   In subsequent rounds of CVM, timeliness improved considerably. According to WFP staff, 96–98 percent of cash-outs were completed on time. Beneficiaries interviewed across Moldova also confirmed this, stating that the payments arrived on schedule.[140]

122.   **Safeguards against misappropriation were comprehensive and generally effective**, and combined government targeting lists, systematic verification, and digitalization of payment systems. Beneficiaries had to present identification to collect cash, and for RHH payments verification was carried out every round by cooperating partners such as World Vision, and later by MLSP. According to WFP staff, these checks were seen as essential for donor confidence and ensured that assistance reached eligible households. However, certain gaps were visible. For example, MLSP information on beneficiary phone numbers was not regularly updated, and many numbers were found to be inactive, which limited WFP's ability to reach beneficiaries for verification or monitoring follow-up.

123.   Post-distribution monitoring and household visits provided additional verification, and beneficiaries stated they were aware that WFP and its partners checked whether people really lived in the listed households and beneficiaries themselves said they trusted the system. In addition, WFP developed an Application Programming Interface (API) with Posta Moldovei, which automated data exchange and reduced manual handling of information. Staff explained that this digitalization was an important step in minimizing errors and improving accountability.

124.   **Some challenges to accessibility were noted.** Early reliance on Western Union during the first round of EFA distributions created barriers for elderly and people with disabilities, who often had to rely on relatives to collect their transfers from the offices of authorized agents. The shift to Posta Moldovei was widely recognized as a major improvement by beneficiaries as the home delivery of cash reduced access barriers for elderly people and persons with disabilities and eased the responsibilities of women who otherwise would have had to accompany dependents to distant pay points. The exclusion of some vulnerable individuals because of barriers to registration for national social assistance programmes (document requirements, limited outreach, limited capacity to process applications) was also noted.[141]

125.   **WFP integrated protection safeguards into its CBT delivery**, with complaints mechanisms and attention to Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and GBV concerns. Protection was embedded in the CBT system from the beginning. A Complaints and Feedback Mechanism (CFM) was set up, including hotlines and face-to-face options through social assistants. Beneficiaries interviewed across CVM, RHH, and RACs confirmed that they were aware of these mechanisms and WFP reported publicizing the CFM through posters, although Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) results suggested that awareness was incomplete.[142] Beneficiaries noted that they had been given phone numbers to call if problems arose. According to HelpAge staff, complaints or proposals about food or services in RACs were shared with WFP and usually addressed quickly, showing that the system was responsive. However, PSEA awareness and communication channels may not have been fully comprehensive, as part of the broader PSEA responsibility lies with UNHCR under the refugee response. WFP complemented rather than duplicated these efforts, and some beneficiaries likely received related information through UNHCR-supported channels such as the inter-agency Greenline, which handled large volumes of refugee protection and cash-related queries and coordinated information exchange with WFP through the AAP Task Force.

126.   Safeguards against PSEA and GBV were also integrated. Verification and feedback channels included the possibility to raise sensitive issues, and referral pathways were established. WFP staff underlined that no PSEA or GBV cases were reported in connection with CBT during the evaluation period. Data protection was also a concern. The software developer contracted by WFP to support UAHelp stored the personal details of all RHH beneficiaries and hosted refugees on Azure as an interim measure until it could

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[139] WFP (2023h)
[140] e.g. WFP (2025c)
[141] WFP (2023g)
[142] 49 percent in 2025 under CVM (WFP, 2025c)

be transferred to more secure storage within Government systems. Surprisingly this wasn't identified as a risk by the WFP Privacy Impact Assessment.

127. **Monitoring of other protection risks was limited to corporate indicators.** While post-distribution monitoring collected data on expenditure patterns and satisfaction, but - in line with corporate guidance - it included relatively few indicators on intra-household decision-making, gender roles, or household dynamics.

2.3.2 To what extent were WFP transfers aligned with existing national systems and with what consequences?

Finding 8.   Aligning WFP transfers with national systems promoted efficiency, sustainability and national ownership. However, in some instances this required a willingness to consider acceptable trade-offs.

128. There was no national system in place in 2022 to channel cash delivery to RHHs within Moldova which therefore had to be created. However, there were still opportunities to align RHH support with elements of the broader social protection system. In contrast the transfers to vulnerable Moldovans through EFA transfers was delivered as a top-up to the Ajutor Social programme. The CVM programme built on these efforts, but rather than topping up the Ajutor Social programme, aimed to complement the national social protection system with the provision of cash assistance during winter.

Table 7. Operational overview of Cash to Vulnerable Moldovans

Operation	EFA 2022-2023	CVM 2023-2024	CVM 2024-2025
Registration	Lists derived from MLSP systems (SIAAS) i.e. Households (HHs) had already registered for Ajutor Social and/or APRA	Lists derived from MLSP systems (SIAAS/CNAS) i.e. HHs had already registered for Ajutor Social and/or APRA	Lists derived from MLSP systems (SIAAS/CNAS) i.e. HHs had already registered for Ajutor Social and/or APRA
Targeting	• One or more members with disabilities of any grade; • A single-parent household with at least one child under 18 years old; • A household with more than three children under 18 years old; • One or more members who are pregnant or lactating or having at least one child under 13 months old.	• Elderly persons/pensioners, receiving a pension of less than 3,000 MDL and born before 1945; • Households with children with severe disabilities; • Households with adults with severe disabilities; • Households with a pregnant or lactating woman (at least one child aged between 0-13 months).	• Elderly pensioners, receiving a pension equal to or less than 3,300 MDL inclusive and who contributed at least 40 years or more of pension; • Households with children with severe disabilities; • Households with children with disabilities.
Transfer value	Monthly EFA entitlement was set at MDL 700 to match APRA. One-time payment, MSL 4,900 MDL.	One-time payment, MDL 3,000 and MDL 5,000.	One-time payment, MDL 2,300, MDL 3,000 (one child) or 6,000 (multiple children); MDL 3,300 (one child) or MDL 6,600 (multiple children)
FSP	Western Union	Poșta Moldovei	Poșta Moldovei
Verification	Lists pre-verified by MLSP. Additional validation used to test AID.MD as a shock-responsive system. Local Social Assistants validated beneficiaries in AID.MD, confirming SIASS/APRA cases met criteria; non-eligible cases were removed and replaced from the discretionary list.	Lists provided pre-verified by MLSP. No additional verification of target group.	Lists provided pre-verified by MLSP. No additional verification of target group.

Source: WFP 2023e; WFP 2024i; WFP 2025d

129. The table above provides an overview of existing national processes followed for each of the operational areas under the EFA/CVM transfers. **EFA and CVM beneficiary households were selected**

based on criteria jointly determined by MLSP and partners, drawing on eligible households in the SIAAS database.[143] While the targeting criteria were adjusted by WFP and United Nations partners, there was a close fit between the design of the emergency cash assistance with MLSP's own means-tested benefits, Ajutor Social and APRA.

130.   **The use of government social registries allowed for streamlined targeting**. Some challenges in data completeness and accuracy were identified. There is a risk of exclusion errors in the SIAAS database as not all households potentially eligible for social assistance necessarily applied. For example, identifying households with pregnant and lactating women was challenging, since the Government does not routinely collect this information.[144] In addition data missed mandatory details, such as phone numbers and addresses, which was crucial for the Western Union payments used under the EFA project, and also to allow for communication with beneficiaries. To effectively manage these issues under the EFA project, WFP developed a strategy to categorize beneficiaries into four groups based on the quality of their data, allowing for parallel processing to correct and complete the information. A process to collect missing information was conducted by WFP's implementing partner and social assistants.

131.   However, otherwise the data accuracy was generally good. In the 2024-2025 distribution round only four percent of beneficiaries failed to cash out their assistance as the SIASS data had not been updated to reflect beneficiaries moving abroad, deceased, or unreachable at delivery.[145]

132.   **Transfer values were aligned with the government's own social protection benchmarks**. Specifically, the EFA 2022-2023 entitlement was set to match the APRA. The transfer value, at MDL 700 per month,[146] matches the APRA monthly payment, and is consistent with that used by other members of the CWG. This was critical to the affordability of potentially sustaining these transfers by Government. However, there was a concern that the adequacy of the transfer value might not be sufficient given the current level of needs.[147]

133.   Under the 2022-2023 response, **verification of EFA top-ups to Ajutor Social were supported by social assistants,** as part of an additional verification exercise to test the AID.md as a shock responsive system. It was observed that 60 percent of the data was missing mandatory details such as phone numbers and addresses which hampered verification.[148] These lists were updated prior to the subsequent CVM distributions. However, future rounds of CVM were not verified by MLSP, as the lists were already drawn from existing national systems. WFP stakeholders emphasized the need for regular data validation processes within the MLSP to improve future reach and targeting.

134.   A key gap in alignment with Government systems under EFA/CVM is the **Complaints and Feedback Mechanism** (CFM), which has remained a WFP model. Despite multiple WFP reviews[149] recommending the CFM process within the MLSP to increase ownership, opportunities to support MLSP to manage their own CFM model have not emerged.

135.   **RHHs** needed to register for the WFP cash transfer. Therefore, the **UAHelp platform**, initially developed by the government for RAC management, was modified with WFP support to allow the registration of RHH and of the refugees using this type of accommodation. From the start of the activity, WFP provided technical support to the Ministry to enable the development and evolution of UAHelp. One key aspect of WFP support was the addition of a verification module.

136.   The **transfer value for RHH was set at the Government's recommendation** at the level of the minimum wage, which in 2022 was MDL 3,500. This value was further adapted in later stages of the

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[143] The information system used by Ajutor Social and APRA
[144] WFP (2024i)
[145] Of the 4% of beneficiaries who did not cash out their assistance: Most cases, 55% - 928 cases (just above 2% of total) were due to incorrect addresses, making delivery by the Post Office not possible 27% - 456 cases (just above 1% of total) were abroad at delivery time. 18% - 303 cases (below 1% of total) were found to be deceased (WFP 2025d).
[146] The total value of the seasonal transfer is MDL 700 x 7 months, or MDL 4,900.
[147] WFP (2023g)
[148] WFP (2024f)
[149] See for example: O'Brien (2023); Waite (2023); WFP (2023c); and Palmer (2024).

programme based on numbers of hosted refugees and inflation.[150] **The payments have been made through WFP's contracted financing service provider** initially Western Union, and subsequently Poșta Moldovei. WFP started using Western Union through a global agreement but subsequently switched to using Poșta Moldovei – who also provide the service to Government - from 2023-2024. This supported access for people with disabilities and elderly with options for both in-person collection and home delivery for immobile recipients.

137.   **WFP has provided significant technical assistance and training to support the improvement of national verification processes** (Finding 9). Prior to 2025, WFP contracted World Vision International (WVI) to carry out the verification of each RHH for each round, every two months. At the time of the evaluation verification had transitioned to social assistants, using the UAHelp platform. This reduced WFP's transaction costs and aided the transition to Government.

2.3.3 How far has WFP social protection support led to efficiencies in the delivery of assistance to vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and to the functions of MLSP social assistance processes?

Finding 9.   WFP provided extensive system-strengthening support to MLSP across the social assistance delivery chain, notably through the development and institutionalisation of the UAHelp platform and enhancements to Ajutor Social systems. Improvements in verification, risk management and data analytics improved efficiency and government ownership of delivery systems. However, contributions in some areas—such as community feedback mechanisms and strengthening social canteens—was limited by political sensitivities, resource constraints and unclear sustainability pathways.

138.   WFP has provided extensive support to MLSP in strengthening the delivery of social assistance across the delivery chain. A key starting point for WFP was creating registration and verification system for RHH beneficiaries through UAHelp (see Box 2).

<div align="center">

Box 2   The UAHelp Registration platform

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A local developer (Evisoft) had developed the **UAHelp** platform on a pro-bono basis as a mechanism to link the managers of the RACs to in-kind assistance held in Government warehouses.[151] WFP commissioned the developer to adapt this platform as a self-registration portal for Moldovans hosting refugees to apply for financial assistance.[152] Data on the refugees being hosted within those households was also collected as a cross check. This platform was reportedly effective in enabling eligible households to apply for assistance, with WFP running communication campaigns through various media.

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[150] WFP KII.

[151] Officially developing or commissioning such a system by Government would normally require a legal instrument and developing the necessary regulation typically takes a significant amount of time. Therefore, this pro-bono arrangement significantly accelerated the system development and facilitated a timely response to the crisis.

[152] WFP staff report that the total cost of the contract for this development was as approximately USD 38,000.

The verification of applicants was initially carried out by WVI on behalf of WFP. However, with a responsible exit in mind, verification processes were migrated from WFP partners to MLSP staff. With the new digital verification module developed in UAHelp, WFP led the training of over 1,500 MLSP social assistants on verification with over 8000 households being verified out of the 9100 registered households.

UAHelp did not have legislative approval and was hosted outside of the main government cloud platform. WFP worked with MLSP to drive the legislative approval of the platform as a formal government tool and supported the migration of UAHelp into the Government's Mcloud. This interoperability provides an extra layer of assurance – for example a link to the immigration database allows a check on whether or not hosted refugees are still in the country. Furthermore, as a government owned system the data is now available for case management by linking beneficiaries to other social services.

The UAHelp tool potentially can be used to support any Government led emergency cash payment as interim measure pending the development of a SRSP digital module.

Source: UAHelp (2024j); WFP KIIs

139.   WFP focused much of their **system-strengthening support to improving the efficiency of the Ajutor Social delivery chain**. In line with the priorities of the MLSP, there was a specific focus on strengthening of cash assurance mechanisms, reducing inclusion errors and fraud.

- A **reconciliation module for Ajutor Social** has been developed in response to a request from the Ministry. Currently information on delays in beneficiaries cashing out their entitlements does not flow back systematically from CNAS - the Government agency responsible for payments of social benefits – to MLSP. The module enables social assistants to identify cases where money has not been regularly collected to confirm whether or not those households are still in need of assistance.

- WFP supported enhanced risk management in conjunction with the Social Inspectorate WFP commissioning a consultant to draft **risk** prevention **guidelines for social assistants**[153]. These describe roles and responsibilities, the types of risks and their prevention, risk management processes and the control and accountability mechanisms. Drafting is complete and the guidelines have been approved by the Minister and are awaiting printing and training.

- WFP produced an analysis and recommendations report on how the MLSP can streamline the application process through the digitisation of paper documents and pre-targeting of potential eligible Moldovans, and, for applicants to access information already stored in a digital form in the e-Governance structure.

- WFP supported the development of the Ajutor Social Data Analytics platform – commonly referred to as the **performance dashboard for Ajutor Social**. The dashboard enables real time access to a large range of performance indicators (see Box 3 for an example) and can generate customized reports – a feature which was reportedly unique across Government Ministries. This has reduced the need for cumbersome and time-consuming manual data extraction from the vast database of

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[153] WFP, 2025e

Ajutor Social records which managers reported could take between three to six weeks. The contract to develop the dashboard cost a modest USD 14,000.

Box 3   Ajutor Social Dashboard
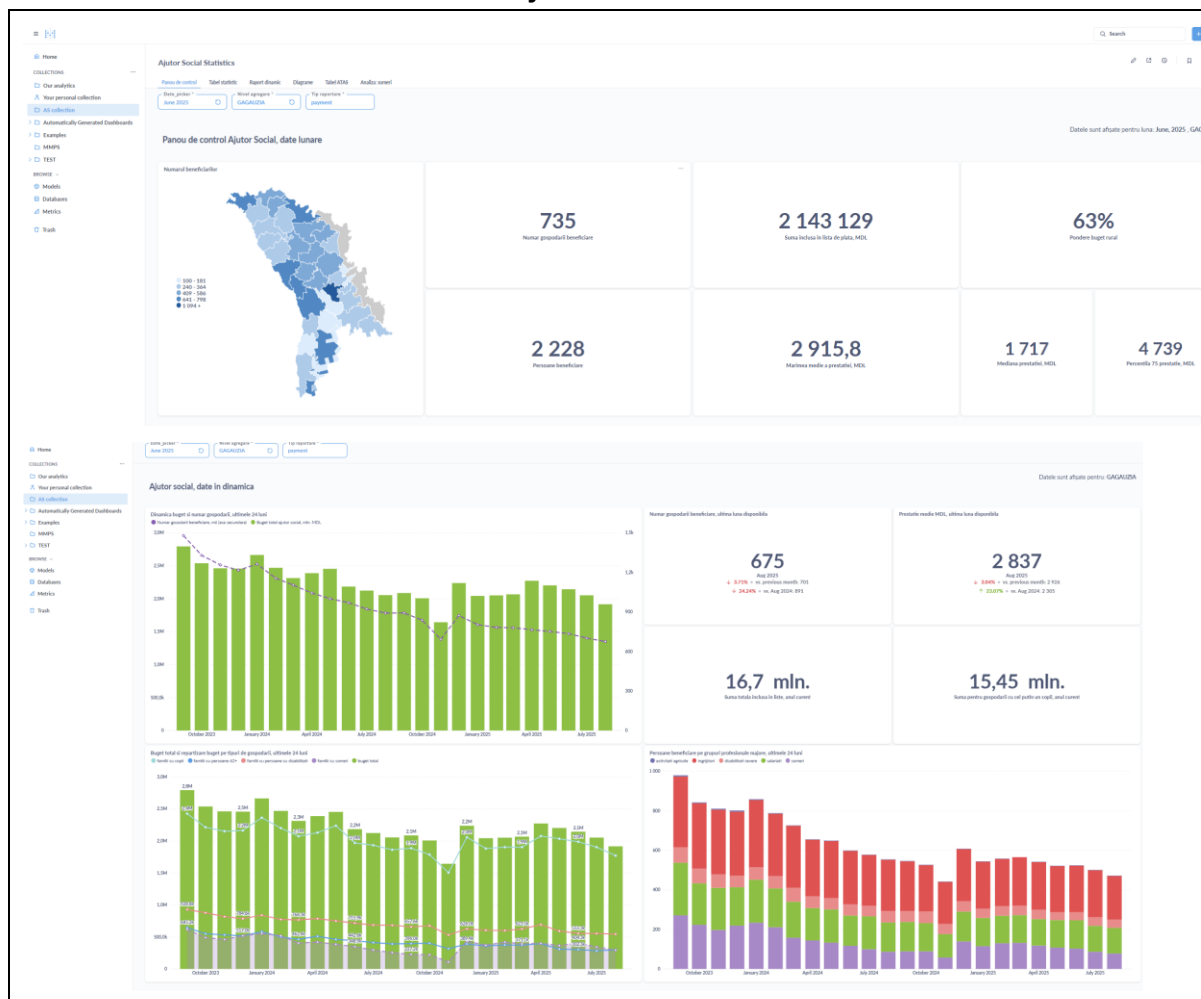
Source: Ajutor Social Dashboards, extract by WFP CO

140.   While still in the testing phase, managers identified clear benefits. The dashboard was seen to have an important role in helping to monitor budget execution – as the MLSP budget for the last 10 years was underspent, this reduced the ability of MLSP to argue with the Ministry of Finance for increased funding. Critically the dashboard supports value for money analysis by comparing performance across districts, for example cost per beneficiary. The Minister highlighted the use of geographical differences in performance to control potential frauds – for example, identifying outliers in the number or proportion of people with disabilities receiving Ajutor Social support. The information was also anticipated to help shape policy, for example providing information on the share of household income coming from these benefits. The dashboard further enabled the MLSP to respond more accurately and quickly to questions from the media.

141.   For the Social Inspectorate, there is an associated dashboard on risks which will be used to support early identification of potential inclusion errors. This dashboard was seen as a valuable planning tool, for example, helping plan which STAS they focus on. WFP argued that better data on levels of fraud in Ajutor Social could be used to counter assumptions of fraud and enhance political support for the programme.

142.   **WFP also contributed to the RESTART digitalization efforts being led by UNDP**.[154] Under the eSocial project UNDP is working to combine all 15 management information systems housed under MLSP

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[154] There is a letter of intent between UNDP and WFP.

into a single "eSocial" MIS Together with RESTART, UNDP, UNICEF and Data4Impact, WFP led an assessment of all 14 MLSP MIS systems, including the Ajutor Social SIASS database using in-house expertise. This was highly appreciated by MLSP.[155] This was used as an input to the UNDP proposal to combine these 15 MIS into a single eSocial MIS, that was endorsed in January 2025.

143. The development of eSocial has important implications for the sustainability of WFP's work. The SIASS is an old (dating from 2005) and unstable system meaning that the current Ajutor Social dashboard which draws on the SIASS MIS is only a temporary solution. However, the dashboard has been developed to be compatible with the eventual eSocial system ensuring sustainability. Similar dashboards will need to be developed for the other modules and social services in eSocial, and developing the Ajutor Social dashboard was seen as helpful in piloting the approach.

144. Developing eSocial has proved to be a challenging task for UNDP, especially given the weakness and fragmentation of existing systems, limited internal MLSP IT capacities and the competing priority of building the EVRF to respond to the energy crisis. It is expected to take several years to operationalize in full and this is reported by UNDP to be a priority over the next four to five years.

145. Early iterations of internal CO system-strengthening strategies consistently identified **strengthening Government CFM mechanisms** based on WFP's global expertise and weaknesses in national systems. However, this was not carried forward into an agreement with Government. Various reasons were suggested by WFP and other United Nations stakeholders. A major factor was the overall sensitivity of MLSP to increasing public awareness of Ajutor Social. There were also internal concerns over whether WFP had the time to institutionalize a CFM and if resources should be prioritized elsewhere. It was also suggested that the UNHCR "Greenline" CFM mechanism might have a comparative advantage as a model for national systems. Nor did Government stakeholders perceive this to be a priority.

146. A further significant area of system-strengthening support has been **training MLSP and associated Government staff** in support of RESTART. WFP supported several staff trainings between 2023 and 2025. A summary of the training courses WFP supported is given in Table 8. Some of the initial training themes were acknowledged by WFP to be tangential to their mandate. However, this investment was seen as contributing to the overall RESTART reforms and helped to build WFP's relationship with MLSP.

Table 8. Trainings of Government Staff supported by WFP under RESTART

Phase	Date	Focus Area	Participants*	Institutions	Trainings	Partners / IPs	Budget (USD)
Phase 1	Q1 2023	AID.MD Digital Platform	1,175	1	1	MLSP/WVI	77,049
Phase 2	Nov 2023–Feb 2024	Data Management; GBV and Case Management	3,538	46	106	MLSP/UNFPA/WVI	1,182,494
Phase 3	Feb–Apr 2024	GBV & Case Management (local level)	1,824	16	45	MLSP/UNFPA/WVI	499,832
Phase 4	Feb–May 2025	Strategic Communication	3,736	15	80	MLSP/WVI	1,139,457
	April–May 2025	UAHelp Verification training	1500	1	1	MLSP	0
	August 18 – August 22 2025	UAHelp introduction training	1458	1	1	MLSP/HelpAge	
Total	2023-2025		**10,272**				**2,898,838**

Source: WFP (2025f)

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[155] MLSP and UN KIIs.

147.	WFP provided key additional funds which expanded the reach of system-strengthening The MLSP budget for training is extremely limited – in 2025 the entire Ministry budget for trainings was of MDL 400,000 (USD 24,000) - making MLSP highly reliant on a range of partners to deliver on the ambitious training agenda associated with the RESTART reforms. MLSP reported that in 2024 a total of 15,000 trainings were organized and of these, 3,500 were with WFP support, while the rest were supported by development partners including UNICEF, IOM and UNHCR.[156]

148.	UNFPA was a key WFP partner in developing the training content. WFP managed the training logistics, provided stipends and ensured accountability, with WVI contracted to provide these services. Verification checks confirmed the relevance of the training topics, the quality of facilities and if attendance numbers matched the reported figures. Based on this information the MLSP was asked, in a few isolated cases, to re-run training sessions to qualify for the stipends. Post course monitoring indicated high degrees of satisfaction with the quality and relevance of the training.

149.	Trainees report positive changes in skills and capacities as well as motivation training on communication with beneficiaries was credited with making them better interlocutors. Training on GBV was credited with associated with an increase in referrals, although data was not available. As well as contributing to professional development, it was widely acknowledged that the training stipends provided an important incentive for staff given low staff salaries and the additional workload associated with both the RESTART reforms and the refugee influx. The stipends were credited with playing an important role in increasing staff motivation and reducing staff turnover.

150.	**Limited progress was made in supporting social canteens.** WFP helped rehabilitate five kitchens together with SODEXO in 2022 - some of which were located in RACs. Studies to build a more comprehensive approach to building the physical, organizational and financial capacities to operate this social service were undertaken by WFP.[157] However, this did not progress to a formal agreement with Government. It proved hard to get agreement from authorities on validating sites for rehabilitation which matched WFP criteria which focused on locations to support new refugee influxes or potential movements from the left bank. The support requested by authorities included significant civil engineering works which exceeded WFP budgets, expertise and anticipated timeline.[158] There was also a degree of competition with local NGOs who already supported various canteens. The idea of commissioning a mobile canteen was considered by WFP but ran up against procurement challenges.

151.	Responsibility for operating social canteens remained largely decentralized with local authorities, which greatly complicated the negotiation of system-strengthening support. There were questions around sustainability with several canteens that had been supported by other development donors reportedly non-operational due to a lack of funds for staff and materials. Stakeholders within the MLSP questioned whether these needs might not be met more cheaply and sustainably through vouchers.

2.3.4 To what extent and in what ways have WFP's institutional arrangements (human resource processes, planning, financing, monitoring and reporting, etc.) facilitated or constrained the ability of WFP Moldova to deliver on its commitments to support strengthened social protection?

**Finding 10.	WFP rapidly mobilised short-term staff to launch an effective emergency response in Moldova, despite high turnover and an initially ad hoc structure. As operations shifted towards system-strengthening and exit planning, longer-term roles were formalised and recruitment strategies adapted, though challenges in attracting national staff persisted.**

152.	**WFP Moldova' staffing structure has evolved over the evaluation period.** Under the LEO, with an immediate focus on delivering of humanitarian assistance, WFP was able to quickly start and scale-up operations from early March 2022 in Moldova through the deployment of short-term international staff on

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[156] The number of unique individuals trained is lower as many benefited from more than one training.
[157] WFP (2023e)
[158] It was noted that civil works are an extra complicated procedure involving a whole series of government regulations. Realistically works would have needed to commence in 2023 to have been completed by exit.

TDY and short-term international consultancy contracts. WFP's ability to rapidly mobilize global expertise in cash-based assistance was widely recognized by government and United Nations partners. Although recruited into short-term positions, the staff brought significant experience of WFP systems, which was seen as critical to the success of the initial response.[159] However, during this initial response, there was no clear staffing structure and turnover of staff was high.[160] Deployments of the early TDY contracts and international consultants in the first six months ranged between seven days and three months.[161] In addition, the key leadership and strategic roles were short-term, with a sequence of emergency coordinators and a lack of guidance on the overall strategy vision. Despite this, senior management from United Nations partner agencies confirmed that the overall performance of WFP in responding to the crisis was good and the initial collaboration between the agencies was strong.

Figure 23 Average length of contract (months) in Moldova for WFP Moldova staff 2022-2025
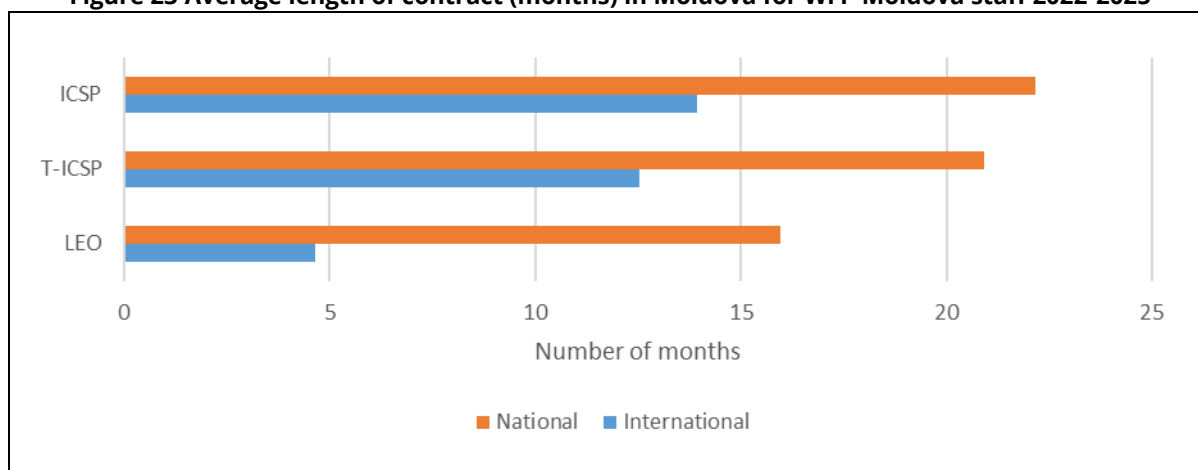
Source: WFP Moldova HR data; averages for individual strategic plans include staff that have longer-term contracts that cut across multiple plans.

153.   The lack of clarity on whether WFP would establish a permanent presence meant that the staffing structure remained undefined until 2023. From December 2022, with the decision for Moldova to have an independent T-ICSP, staff were officially assigned to the Moldova operations. However, it was not until 2023 that the CO was formally established and the Country Director (CD) position filled. Critical decisions on the staffing structure were put in place with the start of the ICSP in early 2024 when staffing levels peaked at 40 and longer-term staff were put in place (see Figure 23). The staffing profile shifted from one that supported delivery of humanitarian assistance to a broader profile that also was able to support the delivery of strategic and technical objectives, supporting the implementation of a responsible exit through social protection system-strengthening and strengthening the strategic focus on partnerships with both government and United Nations agencies. Important changes at this time included the transition of the CBT Coordinator to become the SO1 Manager and the formalization of a Social Protection Specialist as SO2 Manager.[162] The SO2 manager position was also made into a Limited Fixed-Term contract to attract the right calibre of applicant as it was seen as a key strategic position.

154.   WFP has faced several recruitment challenges. First, it has been challenging to fill national positions, due to a limited talent pool within the country, especially staff with experience working in humanitarian organisations. The short planning cycles of the LEO, T-ICSP and ICSP hindered the ability of WFP to offer longer-term contracts for national staff. Consequently, WFP recruitment strategies included targeted outreach to individuals, aimed at attracting qualified national staff for particular key roles. In addition, the recruitment of a senior international staff member as Head of HR from mid-2023 enabled WFP to employ creative recruitment solutions to bring in the profiles required. For example, WFP sought waivers to be able

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[159] WFP CO KIIs.
[160] Naranjilla (2025)
[161] WFP CO HR data.
[162] WFP, 2025g

to offer alternative contract types and higher grades than standard to attract high calibre candidates (Figure 24 illustrates the use of a variety of contract types under the T-ICSP and ICSP to attract staff). Specific staff benefits were offered, such as the provision of English language courses. A key gap acknowledged was related to procurement, where the CO relied on the regional office and HQ for support up until mid-2024, which has delayed local purchases. However, through the introduction of a national officer for procurement (mid-2024) and more recently cost-sharing with the Ukraine CO, this gap has filled.

Figure 24 Evolution in contract types under the LEO, TICSP and ICSP
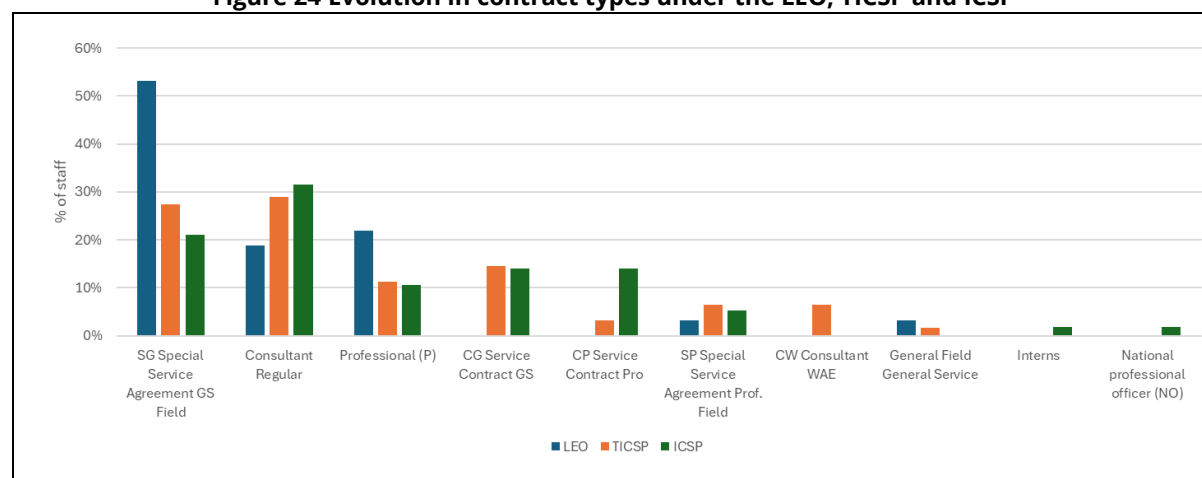
Finding 11.   **WFP's strategic planning evolved in response to the rapidly changing context, with the T-ICSP providing a crucial bridge between initial emergency operations and the development of a more ambitious ICSP. However, while the ICSP set a clear strategic direction, delays in consolidating key leadership roles and high staff turnover slowed the operationalisation of its social protection ambitions.**

155.   The evolution of WFP Moldova's overarching strategic planning approach reflects the fast-evolving situation in the country. Following the initial LEO, the T-ICSP was put in place from September 2022, and was recognised to have provided an important bridge between the LEO and ICSP, allowing the time needed to take stock of the evolving situation in the country, including changing refugee caseloads, and to reposition with key partners. The design of the ICSP took a year and was initiated following the formalisation of the Moldova CO and appointment of a CD.

156.   WFP staff reflected that the ICSP had supported WFP to set the high-level ambition for operations and been important in supporting an overall change in strategic direction. However, the details for the operationalization of this repositioning were not clearly elaborated in the ICSP. Some reflected that the broad nature of the ICSP hindered WFP's ability to quickly move forward ambitions related to providing assistance to the social protection system; however, others felt that this broad framework provided the CO with the flexibility it needed and pointed to other tools that were used to unpack the detailed strategic direction.

157.   Beyond the corporate planning framework, WFP invested internal capacity heavily into analytical processes to support planning. There was a carefully considered and thoughtful approach to operationalizing the broad ambitions of the ICSP. WFP conducted analyses and assessments for each of the key areas of system-strengthening support, allowing WFP to understand the feasibility of engagement in each of these areas and plan how WFP would handover its technical assistance activities to government and partners as part of a responsible exit approach. This analysis fed into project specific concept notes and subsequently to a series of Memorandums of Understanding with MLSP.

158.   At a strategic level, there have been a series of attempts to bring together a strategic social protection offer since late 2022. These attempts, along with the various project-specific design inputs, fed into a Moldova Social Protection Offer 2024-2026, which was finalized in June 2024. However, short-term staff and high turnover affected the speed at which this process was finalized. Many WFP stakeholders (HQ, Regional and CO level) felt that an earlier consolidation of key strategic roles, in particular the social

protection lead, who was not appointed until January 2024, would have supported ambitions to have been realized much sooner. However, it is also recognized that operationalization of this offer may not have been possible much sooner due to the pressures the RESTART reform put MLSP under in 2023.[163]

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[163] MLSP was busy finalising a legal framework for the RESTART reform in 2023.

Figure 25 WFP Moldova analytical and planning processes 2022-2025
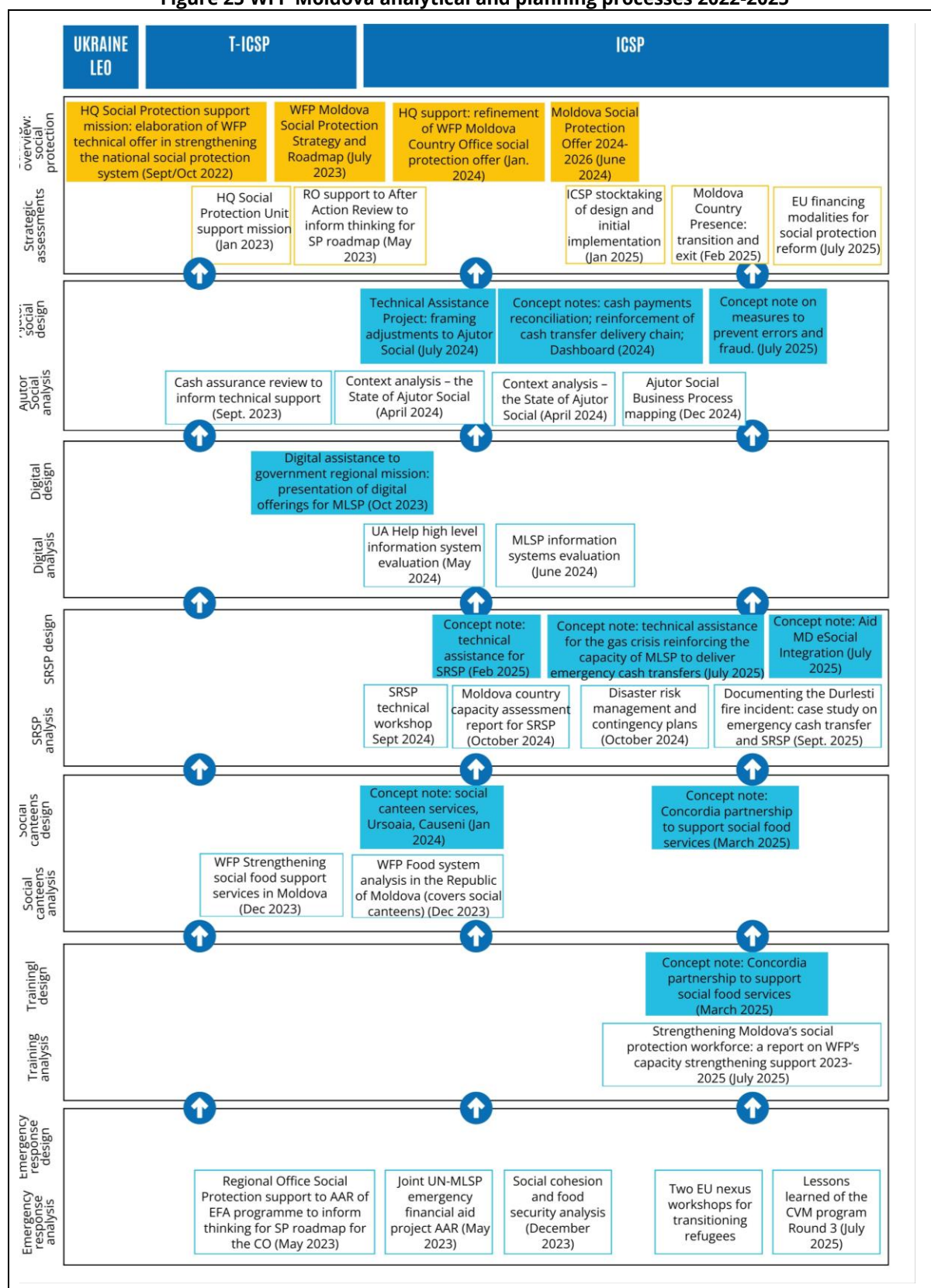
Source: Mokoro drawing on WFP Moldova e-library.

Finding 12. **WFP Moldova consistently met its funding requirements thanks to strong donor engagement and clear strategic positioning. However, earmarking toward refugee assistance limited flexibility, making careful budget management essential to sustain system-strengthening efforts.**

159.   **WFP Moldova has been well funded**. As shown in Figure 26, funding received exceeded the needs-based plan (NBP) under the T-ICSP and ICSP between 2022 and 2024. Funding peaked at 144 percent of the NBP in both 2023 and 2024. To date, the NBP is 83 percent funded for 2025 (see Table 4).

Figure 26 Total funding, including resource transfers (RT), and needs-based plan (NBP) for WFP Moldova 2022-2025
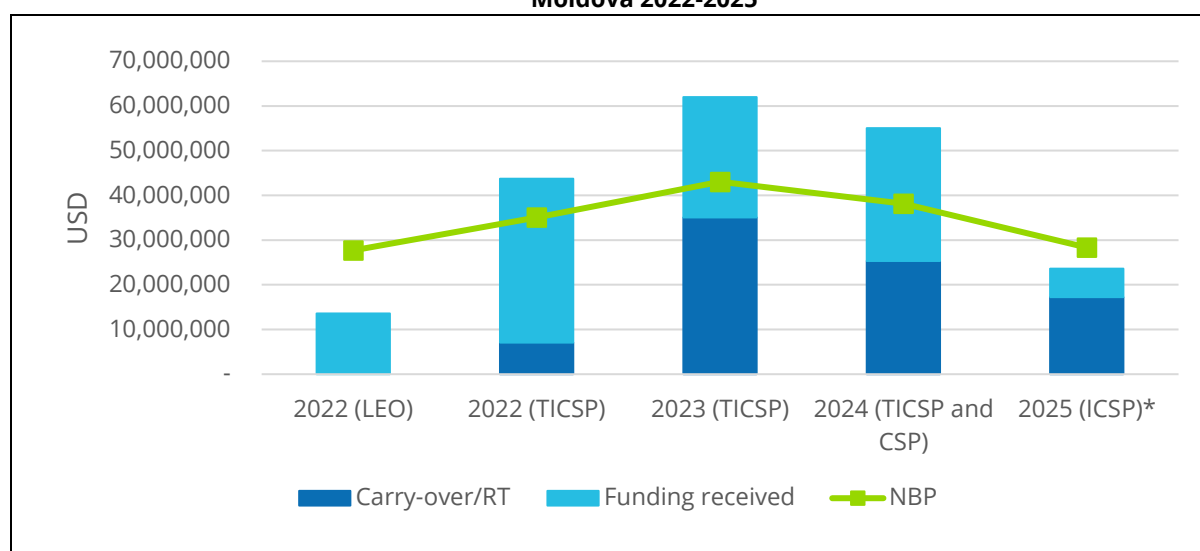
Source: WFP Moldova CPB; *data for 2025 up to 22 August 2025.

160.   WFP Moldova has had a strong base of humanitarian funding (Figure 27). Informants noted that WFP has maintained strong donor commitment throughout the years, despite projected declines in ODA from 2025[164] linked to a stabilizing refugee crisis. WFP's fundraising success is attributed to:[165]

- capitalizing on the strong donor environment in neighbouring Ukraine, where many donors also supported Moldova;
- strong donor relations and an in-depth understanding of donor priorities and funding cycles that has been maintained by the CO, in particular as a result of regular communication between senior management and key donors;
- WFP's positioning across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus;
- clear messaging on a responsible, timebound exit strategy, which reassured donors;
- direct advocacy by the Minister for Labour and Social Protection, who lobbied donors to support social assistance and system-strengthening activities.

161.   Despite the high level of funding **the use of funds has been partially restricted**. Many donors have earmarked funding for the Ukrainian refugee response. Key donors have prioritized their funding to fulfil the needs of the refugee response, although it has been possible to flexibly allocate some funds to system-strengthening activities, as well as the support to vulnerable Moldovans. Grants with a higher level of flexibility, including a contribution from the private sector that was flexible and not timebound, helped to maintain a healthy pipeline. Funds were carried over between years to sustain operations, and in particular to ensure a pool of resources under SO2 for system-strengthening activities.

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[164] The OECD projects a 9 to 17 percent drop in ODA in 2025. This comes on top of a 9 percent drop in 2024. This decline is driven by announced cuts from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, show are four major providers of ODA; (OECD, 2025)
[165] WFP KIIs and donor KIIs.

Figure 27 Contribution of individual donors to WFP Moldova under the LEO, T-ICSP and ICSP (2022-2025)
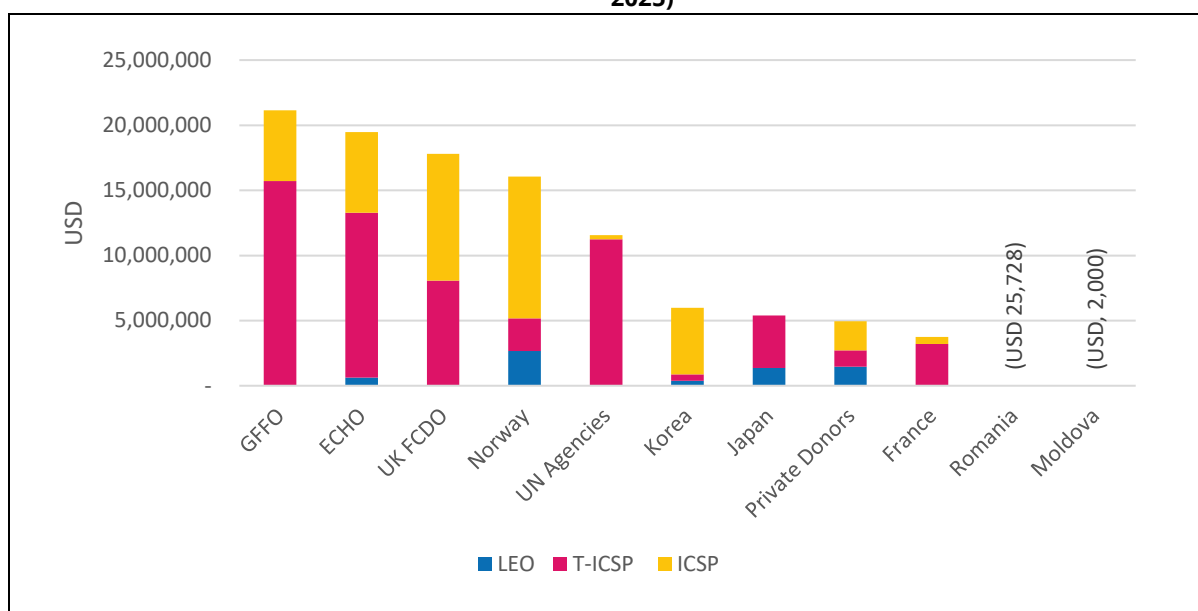
Source: WFP Moldova CPB

162.   In the first year of implementation, there was a relatively low level of expenditure against the implementation plan (see Figure 28). In 2022 under the LEO, expenditure was 23 percent of the implementation plan, and in 2022 under the T-ICSP expenditure was 43 percent of the implementation plan. This can largely be attributed to the time it took for the WFP Moldova CO to become a fully functioning team, with longer-term staff in position. Other factors included the receipt of key donor contributions late in the year;[166] specific conditions placed on funds by donors; the postponement of cash transfers to vulnerable Moldovans from late 2022 until early 2023; and delays in the implementation of technical assistance due to extensive consultations required with Government and other partners before expenditure was required.[167]

Figure 28 Total expenditure and implementation plan under for WFP Moldova 2022-2025
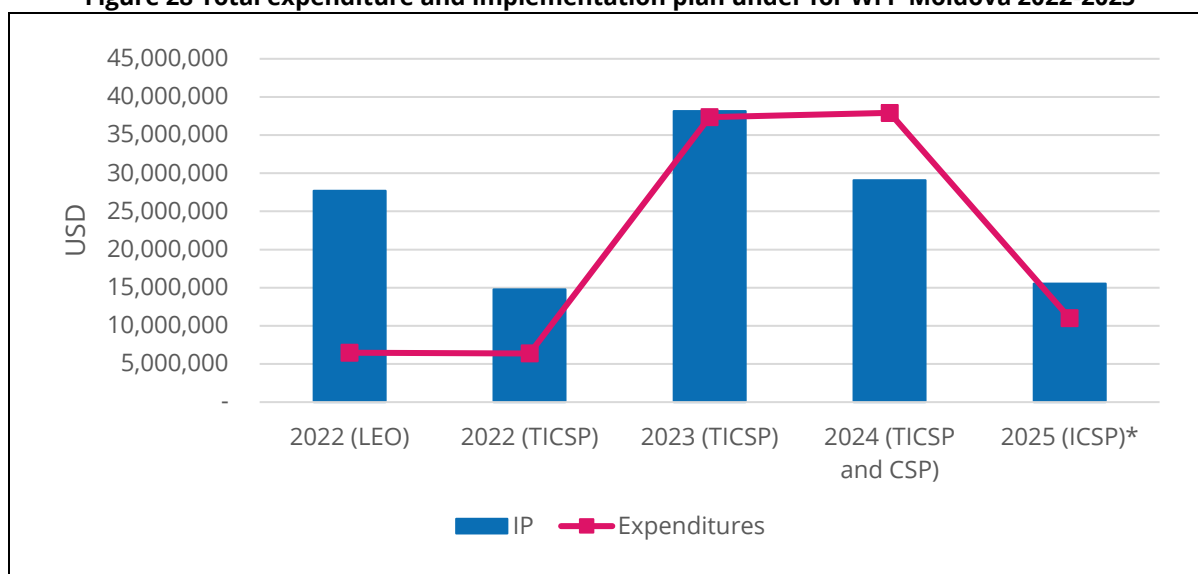
Source: WFP CO data

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[166] In 2022, 43 percent of funding was received late in the year (WFP (2022a); WFP (2022b)).
[167] WFP (2022a), WFP (2022b)

Finding 13. **WFP Moldova met corporate monitoring requirements and used post-distribution data to adjust core programme elements. However, limited documentation of system-strengthening and policy engagement activities restricted its ability to demonstrate broader strategic results.**

163. **The WFP CO has ensured monitoring and reporting of indicators to fulfil the requirements of the WFP corporate results framework**. Additional monitoring activities have also been introduced to respond to donor requests and inform programming. This includes the introduction of FGDs in the RACs to collect qualitative data on the satisfaction with WFP programming, as well as a limited number of food security related outcome indicators that were introduced in 2025 as part of the post distribution monitoring of the CVM cash top-ups, despite corporate framework not requiring outcome monitoring as part of one-off distributions. WFP reported sufficient capacity for monitoring and reporting to fulfil corporate minimum standards, with external providers supporting regular post-distribution and outcome monitoring activities.

164. Interviews and ACRs confirmed that monitoring results have informed programming and supported adjustments, although this has not always been systematic. The WFP CO team drew on monitoring results to confirm the correct targeting of the most vulnerable groups under the CVM programme, and the use of cash assistance to support critical needs, including utilities, food and health. Multiple respondents recalled the initial post-distribution monitoring results that showed the vulnerability of targeted Moldovans as higher than refugees assisted in RACs, which shaped the longer-term strategy for WFP in Moldova. Programme adjustments that have been made because of monitoring findings, for example the introduction of standardised menus for refugees in RACs from 2024 to cater to refugee preferences and ensure safe and nutritious food, as well as the amendment of the transfer value in 2022 for RHHs, according to the number of refugees hosted by a household. However, the ET found examples of findings that have not translated into actions. For example, data has shown awareness of the CFM hotline to be limited under the CVM distributions, although there has been some improvement (2 percent aware in 2024[168] and 49 percent in 2025[169]), and no evidence was found of changes to procedures to increase awareness.

165. A CO decision to focus on meeting the minimum corporate requirements for monitoring and reporting, in particular monitoring the delivery of CBTs, has limited the extent to which the full story of WFP support to Moldova has been told. This demonstrates the unique context in which WFP opened operations in Moldova, alongside the transition from emergency assistance to supporting national systems, and the preparations for a responsible exit. The ability to measure results from system-strengthening and technical assistance activities is challenging. WFP Moldova primarily capture outputs (e.g. number of trainings conducted, strategies supported) but more upstream activities such as policy dialogue, systems support, and system-strengthening are not systematically documented, with evidence of activities fragmented and not consistently analysed for programme adjustment, real-time learning, and external communication, both within WFP globally, and with donors and partners. The CO recognized this limitation, noting challenges recruiting more senior and strategically focused monitoring, reporting and communication personnel.

2.4. To what extent have WFP interventions contributed to, or are they expected to contribute to, strengthening the institutional capacities of the MLSP and addressing the essential needs of vulnerable population in Moldova?

2.4.1 To what extent have the multipurpose cash assistance to Moldovans and hot meals targeting refugees enabled beneficiaries to meet their essential needs?

Finding 14. **WFP's multipurpose cash assistance and hot meal provision were effective in helping both Moldovan and refugee households meet essential needs, improving food security and reducing negative coping strategies, with beneficiaries consistently valuing the flexibility and relevance of cash. However, transfer values were insufficient to fully meet household need and ongoing**

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[168] WFP (2024k)
[169] WFP (2025c)

vulnerabilities persist as humanitarian support winds down. While assistance supported social stability, its contribution to fostering refugee-host community solidarity was difficult to demonstrate,

166.   **The multipurpose cash assistance programmes (EFA and CVM), along with RHH payments, were highly valued by beneficiaries**. Post-distribution monitoring demonstrated improvements in food security across all transfers. According to the PDM survey conducted in early 2025, 69 percent of beneficiaries used the assistance primarily for food, 66 percent reported using the cash for healthcare, and 63 percent spent the assistance on utility bills, showing alignment with seasonal winter needs.[170] 97 percent of households achieved an acceptable food consumption score, though reliance on coping strategies remained high, signalling persistent vulnerability. Interviews confirmed that households used these transfers to cover the most urgent needs, including food, utility bills, and medicines. Some households also reported using the transfers for rehabilitation of children and other family members with disabilities.

167.   **The coverage of CVM was significant**, at its peak reaching roughly eight percent of Moldova's population, making an important contribution to stabilizing consumption among vulnerable households. Beneficiaries explained that without this cash they would have been forced to reduce food consumption or heating, particularly in winter when utility bills were at their highest. In this sense, the assistance had a clear and positive impact on maintaining household well-being during a period of crisis.

168.   Nevertheless, **sufficiency was an issue**. Importantly, transfer values were aligned with what the government and donors could sustain, which ensured feasibility and extended coverage but limited the degree to which support could fully match household-level needs. 74 percent of CVM beneficiaries in the 2023 PDM stressed that adequacy of the transfer value was insufficient to comprehensively meet needs of target population.[171] CVM and RHH payments provided crucial relief but were not enough to meet gaps to provide adequate food, pay utilities, and cover medical expenses. Households therefore had to prioritize between different needs and monitoring of RHH households indicated a deterioration in coping strategies over time as inflation eroded the value of the transfer (see Figure 29).

Figure 29 Coping Strategy Index (Food), refugee hosting households

169.   **The flexibility of cash was highly appreciated**. Beneficiaries explained that cash was more convenient than vouchers, which had restrictions and higher prices in designated shops. With cash, households could choose whether to spend on food, heating fuel, school supplies, or health-related

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[170] Respondents could select more than one option.
[171] WFP (2023g)

expenses. This adaptability made cash particularly relevant in Moldova's context, where vulnerabilities varied across households and markets functioned well.

170.   For refugees, hot meals in RACs were consistently described as regular, balanced, and nutritious. Beneficiaries highlighted that meals included vegetables, fruits, meat, fish, cereals, and seasonal items, and that menus were adjusted when feedback was given. Refugees underlined that their basic food needs were fully covered while in RACs, and many pointed to this as one of the main reasons why they preferred to stay in RACs rather than rely on other forms of accommodation. Portions were generally sufficient, although some refugees did mention that fruit portions became smaller in recent months, which they linked to reduced funding, but overall satisfaction with meals remained high (see Figure 30).

Figure 30 Food Consumption Score (FCS), RACs.
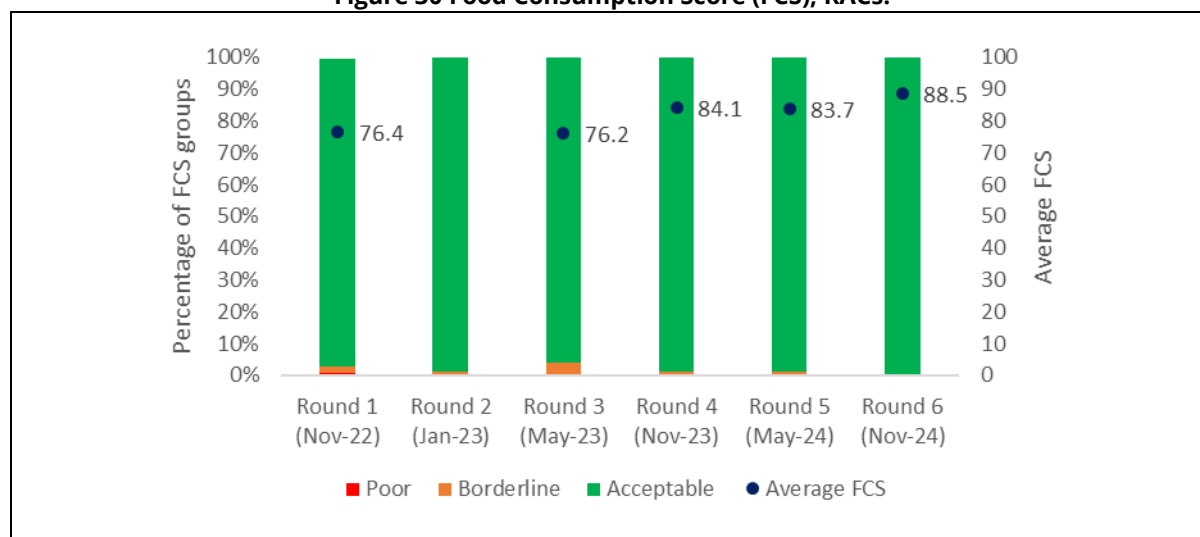
Source: WFP Post Distribution Monitoring Reports

171.   An important additional stated objective of CVM was to support Moldovans alongside refugees and reduce tensions and show solidarity with host communities. Monitoring supported by the Resident Coordinators Office found that attitudes of Moldovans to refugees had remained positive and consistent over the evaluated period.[172] However, it was hard to demonstrate the contribution of WFP transfers in maintaining positive attitudes. Beneficiaries did not associate CVM with refugee-related solidarity as this link was not explained to them.

35. Finally, both Moldovan and refugee households expressed appreciation for WFP's assistance but also concerns about the future. Needs continue, and there is uncertainty about how they will be met as humanitarian programmes scale down. Beneficiaries stressed that while support helped them survive during the crisis, their vulnerabilities are ongoing and will require sustained attention through national systems.

2.4.2 To what extent is WFP support achieving its intended objective of enhancing inclusive and shock-responsive social protection and food security systems and capacities of Government of Moldova?

172.   In addition to providing technical assistance to improve the efficiency of MLSP in delivering cash transfers, WFP also sought to increase the inclusiveness and shock responsiveness of the social protection system working through three main pathways; (i) advocating and preparing for the inclusion of refugees within national systems, (ii) leveraging MLSP capacities for improved crisis response and (iii) increasing the accessibility and management of Ajutor Social to reduce exclusion errors.

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[172] Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development, Social Tensions Monitoring Mechanism household surveys conducted in 2022 and 2024 both reported a score of 5.5 out of 10 on Positive Feelings towards Ukrainian refugees in Moldova (SeeD, 2022; SeeD, 2024)

Finding 15. **WFP has played a substantive and constructive role in advancing the integration of refugees into Moldova's social protection system, leveraging coordination platforms, advocacy influence and technical contributions such as the UAHelp MIS. However, while political willingness for inclusion has increased—partly triggered by the risk of declining external funding—progress remains constrained by government fiscal limitations.**

173.   UNHCR led advocacy for the overall **inclusion of refugees in national systems.** Politically there is a notable willingness to work towards integrating refugees within national systems. However, the Government has made clear that given fiscal constraints they are looking to donor contributions to underpin this transition. Government stakeholders highlighted that the demographic profile of refugees who have stayed in Moldova tends to be highly vulnerable and often elderly, requiring high levels of support, whereas other countries have benefited from inflows of economically active and more affluent refugees who bring economic benefits to the host countries.

174.   In May 2025 a National Programme for Phased Integration of Foreigners,[173] developed in coordination with partners and with a request for donor funding, was issued by the Prime Minister's Office. The threat of an abrupt termination of UNCHR support to refugees due to a lack of funding in mid-2025 was seen as an additional trigger. The Prime Minister sent a letter to donors, asking for a continuation of immediate support to refugees but also committing to integrate refugees into national systems in the future.

175.   WFP has made a substantive contribution to finding solutions to integrate refugees within the social protection system. Concrete advocacy and influencing efforts are linked to WFP co-leadership of the RRP ISWG and EU-Nexus social protection Framework coordination groups. The specific experience of WFP staff was drawn on to facilitate two EU-UN nexus workshops in 2024 and 2025 with the objectives of identifying complementarities between humanitarian aid and development funding, the revision of the legislative framework and the assessment of progress. This generated a roadmap for the transition from humanitarian and development assistance. Building on this workshop the CD has helped to advance a proposal to include a refugee window in the proposed multi-donor trust fund, to bridge the financing gap as the RRP phases out in 2026. As part of the RRP Inclusion and Solutions Working Group WFP has taken the lead in drawing up a ISWG Action Plan (2025-2026) on joint UN-NGO action to support the refugee integration efforts across the RRP and UNSDCF whilst formulating a MLSP-led Social Protection Roadmap as an investment case to fund refugee integration in MLSP programmes as per the National Programme for the Phased Integration of Foreigners (NPPIF) MLSP commitments.

176.   In addition, WFP sought to enhance the MLSP technical capacity to respond to the refugee needs. Technical preparation work is the development and handover of the UAHelp MIS which was designed to be the MLSP MIS for managing refugee integration into MLSP programmes.

Finding 16. **WFP pursued a flexible and evolving strategy to strengthen the shock-responsiveness of the social protection system, shifting from leveraging Ajutor Social toward developing a distinct emergency cash transfer package centered on Ajutor Monetar, paired with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), digital tools, and legal reforms. While progress has been made—particularly in partnership-building—implementation risks remain due to incomplete legislation, varying stakeholder ownership, and the need to balance emergency cash assistance with broader crisis response tools.**

177.   WFP adopted a pragmatic and adaptive approach to strengthening the shock responsiveness of the national system. The Social Protection Offer - identified two main pathways for **strengthening the shock-responsiveness of Moldova's national social protection system**: one was to analyze the shock responsiveness of government cash transfers, and the other was to provide support embedding SOPs into national contingency plans (see ToC). This approach evolved overtime, influenced in part by the changing legislative and regulatory context. The principal objective of the SRSP mechanism focused on leveraging the use of cash transfers to respond to emergencies.

178.   WFP conducted a Country Capacity Assessment for shock-responsive social protection (completed in August 2024) and a Government-WFP workshop to unpack existing social protection and DRM processes

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[173] National Programme for Phased Integration of Foreigners; Government of Moldova (2025).

for providing assistance and identifying gaps and opportunities for SRSP in September 2024. A review of the assessment report by the ET suggested that greater granularity of analysis was required to inform programming and raises the question of the suitability of the corporate tool for upper-middle income country contexts with complex DRM policy environments. Moreover, the bilateral Government missed the participation of other key United Nations stakeholders.

179.	Further analysis by WFP examined which existing Government cash transfer programmes could be leveraged to respond to emergencies. An initial working hypothesis that Ajutor Social could be the programme used to deliver SRSP appears to have been based on its use to facilitate the delivery of EFA and CVM.[174] However, further analysis showed that Ajutor Social and other social transfer programmes lacked the operational speed and coverage required for rapid crisis response and confirmed the need for a distinct SRSP-specific architecture.

180.	A subsequent assessment, in cooperation with MLSP and UNICEF, assessed the feasibility of integrating shock responsive elements into a wider set of cash transfer programmes and social services.[175]. Based on this, stakeholders, including WFP, see the use of Ajutor Monetar as a more feasible programme for initial crisis response. Ajutor Monetar is a one-off or monthly benefit with a duration of maximum six months for extremely deprived individuals or households,[176] and the amendment of the government decision legislating it is currently considered by stakeholders as the most rapid and straightforward solution. The choice of the social benefits that could be used for horizontal expansion in case of a crisis and the operationalization through legislation of such choices therefore depends on factors that are well outside WFP influence. WFP also examined support for embedding SOPs for cash-based crisis response into national contingency plans owned by the Ministry of Interior. However, this proved challenging given political sensitivities and competing priorities within the Ministry.

181.	MLSP technical level staff perceived that the MLSP is still in the process of conceptualizing SRSP, in the broader context of the new law and establishment of the centre for crisis management, and the recent establishment of a crisis management working group in MLSP, similar to other ministries. While MLSP interest in SRSP-related support offered by WFP appears to have wavered, it was recently revived alongside a MLSP request for WFP to provide direct assistance to the Durlesti apartment fire victims in 2025. Subsequently a MLSP–WFP MoU was signed in July 2025 to establish a national emergency cash transfer package comprising flexible SOPs to address different types of emergencies, a digital SRSP module within eSocial to generate beneficiary lists, a preparedness checklist for MLSP, and a legal reform pathway—coordinated with UNICEF—to modify the Ajutor Monetar decision to address emergency needs.

182.	Work on the digital module has progressed and a developer commissioned. WFP has been conscious of the need to work in close partnership with UNDP to promote sustainability by designing the module to be integrated within the eSocial platform with the support of UNDP. UNICEF has led on the legislative reforms but has consulted with WFP in taking this forward. MLSP has a separate MoU with UNICEF for the institutionalization of SRSP, focused on policies and legislative reform.

183.	While stakeholders were cautiously positive, WFP had not yet shared technical details with partners meaning that it was premature to assess potential outcomes. Some stakeholders flagged risks to progressing technical solutions given that the legal and regulatory framework for disaster risk management is still under development. The risk was also seen of over emphasizing the use of emergency cash transfers – for example suggesting that other policies and programmes could be more appropriate in responding to the effects of climate shocks on agriculture.

184.	Interviews also emphasized that many of the more general pieces of work WFP provided to support system-strengthening of MLSP, such as contributions to digitalization and interoperability, business process mapping and training of local level staff have all contributed to enhancing the shock responsiveness of the national social protection system.

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[174] WFP (2023e)
[175] UNICEF Consultant ToR
[176] Government of Moldova (2018)

Finding 17. **WFP strategically focused system-strengthening efforts on Ajutor Social, to serve both long-term poverty reduction and as a platform for emergency response. However, despite evidence-based advocacy and targeted support, political resistance to expanding coverage severely limited progress, with competing government priorities and budget constraints preventing programme reform or scale-up.**

185.   WFP initially saw **strengthening Ajutor Social** as serving the dual purpose of providing the underlying infrastructure for emergency transfers and reducing poverty. As noted in the WFP Social Protection Social Protection In Country Strategic Plans Manual *"the best way for a social protection system to be of use in an emergency is for the system to be effective even in normal times, by providing a strong foundation upon an emergency response could be topped over. Good social protection programmes are therefore already helpful in reducing the effects of crises, and WFP can contribute to this by supporting their improved coverage, comprehensiveness, adequacy, and quality"*.[177] A wide cross-section of stakeholders, including some within MLSP, acknowledged that more needed to be done to address poverty rates, including through improved access to Ajutor Social.

186.   The social protection offer (see Figure 10) identified a possible role for WFP in supporting communication campaigns to increase public awareness and inform beneficiaries of entitlements,[178] as well as advocacy to encourage Government and donors to increase resourcing. However, efforts to increase coverage were reported to be politically sensitive. The Government faced a range of urgent priorities, and with pressures on the national budget and a large share already allocated to social protection (see Figure 31), the appetite in senior levels of Government to increase investment in Ajutor Social was reportedly minimal.

Figure 31 National public budget approved for 2025 (MDL m)
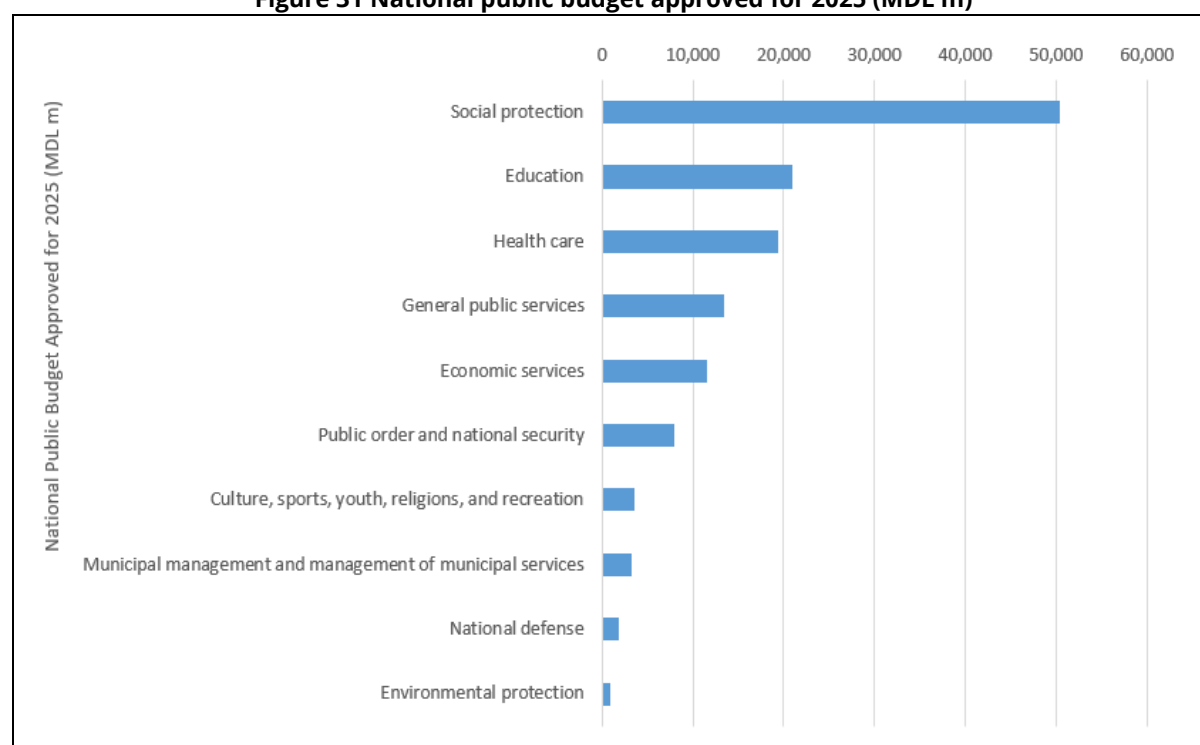
Source: Moldova Ministry of Finance (2025)

187.   Consequently, the Government actively discouraged activities to increase Ajutor Social coverage. For example, the *joint UN-MLSP Technical Assistance Project validated by MLSP* dropped Ajutor Social from the title. It was made clear that policy analysis, such as an assessment of the effects of the tightened eligibility

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[177] WFP (2022e), page 16.
[178] This was also included as a recommendation of the After Action Review (WFP, 2023e)

criteria on poverty rates, was not welcome. WFP funded top-ups of Ajutor Social through EFA and CVM, supported a vertical rather than horizontal expansion of the caseload.

188.   The Technical Assistance MoU did retain activities to strengthen Ajutor Social, but these were aligned to the RESTART reforms and improved efficiency by identifying inclusion errors. Several stakeholders contended that better assurance could be leveraged to build political support for the programme. However, the political concerns were not limited to the misuse of funds but extended to the disincentive effects on job seeking and whether these funds could be better employed more productively by Government. Ajutor Social has previously had much larger caseloads and the decision to defund it is understood as a conscious decision.[179]

189.   Quiet advocacy in support of more investments in the social sector to sustain reforms and to better equip the existing social protection system in their objective of reducing poverty has continued, principally led by the CD. As evidenced by levels of enrollment, advocacy has so far had little effect. In practice, the coverage of Ajutor Social has shrunk dramatically between 2021 and 2025 – from 56,000 to 13,000 households (see Figure 32). Complex legislative changes and reforms have led to a drop in the number of households in Ajutor Social.

Figure 32 Number of households under Ajutor Social per month
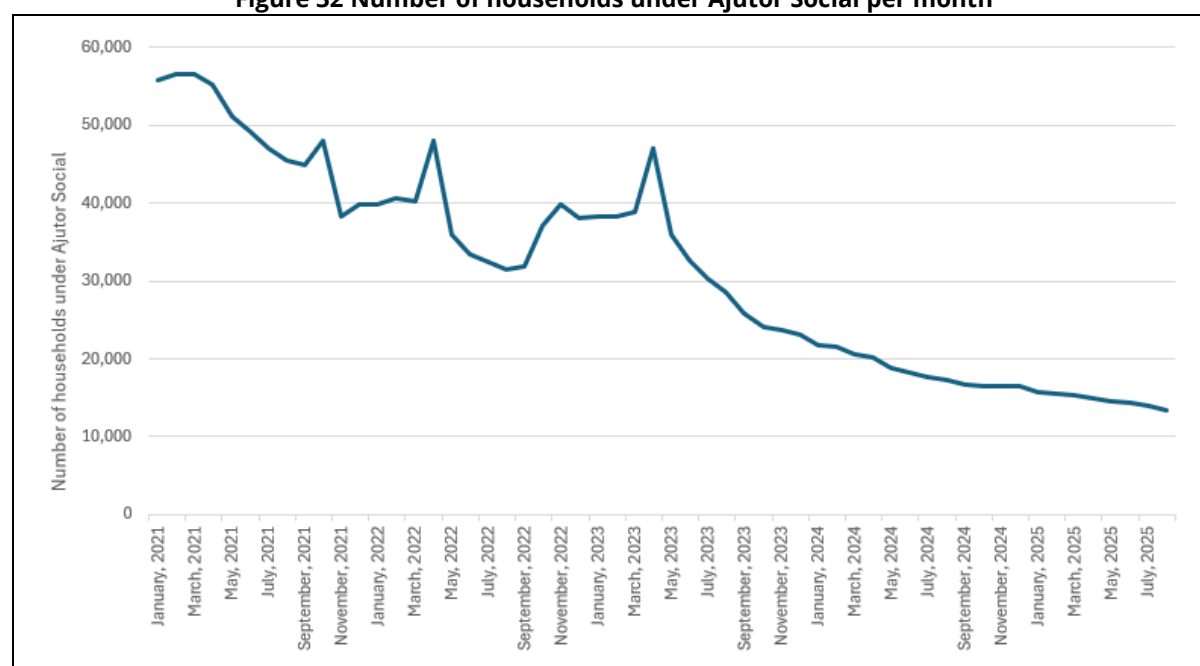
Source: Ajutor Social Dashboard

190.   There was an acknowledgement amongst stakeholders that a meaningful reform of the programme is dependent on joint agreement and action by Government, IFIs and key donors. Neither the EU or World Bank currently prioritizes support to Ajutor Social in their investment plans, nor has Government expressed an interest in using donor grants or loans for this purpose.

2.4.3 How did the social protection system-strengthening and cash assistance activities address gender inequality and the special needs of children, vulnerable Moldovans and refugees?

Finding 18.   WFP's cash-based assistance and support to social protection systems in Moldova were broadly effective in reaching women and other groups disproportionately affected by gendered vulnerabilities, reducing caregiving pressures and improving access to essential needs. However, gaps

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[179] The World Bank had also reportedly already completed a study demonstrating that levels of fraud in Ajutor Social are relatively low.

remained in systematically addressing the needs of marginalised groups and WFP did not attempt to extend beyond womens' inclusion to transformative or empowerment-focused approaches.

191.   **The design of EFA and CVM CBTs explicitly targeted categories reflecting Moldova's gendered inequalities.** Elderly people with low pensions (predominantly women), single-parent households (mainly women-headed), and families with children with disabilities (where women usually are primary caregivers) were prioritized. Progressive digitalization and systematic verification also strengthened monitoring of vulnerable households, further aligning delivery with inclusion principles.

192.   By reaching these groups, WFP reduced the financial and time stress faced by women as primary caregivers, allowing them to cover food, utilities, and medicines. Interviews with CVM and RHH recipients confirmed that women often used the transfers to manage children's healthcare costs or winter heating, alleviating pressures that otherwise would have fallen disproportionately on them. The flexibility of cash was an important factor, allowing beneficiaries to adapt to unpredictable needs, for example when children required urgent medical treatment or when heating expenses rose in cold months. Focus group discussions also suggested that assistance sometimes changed dynamics within households, for example by easing women's caregiving burden, but these effects were not captured consistently in WFP's monitoring frameworks.

193.   However, **concerns were raised that Roma families were at risk of exclusion** because they were less likely to appear in official records. The AAR of the EFA recommended community engagement to better understand whether gender and protection consideration need to be reinforced in the targeting and implementation of assistance and the ICSP proposed cultivating strategic partnerships with organizations representing marginalized population groups such as people with disabilities, LGBTIQA+ people and Roma. However, it was decided to not pursue these efforts, because it was within the mandate of other UN Agencies responding to crisis in Moldova, notable UNHCR and UN Women.

194.   In the RACs women and children formed the majority of the caseload. From a gender and child perspective, these meals mattered because they relieved women of the daily time and cost of preparing food while displaced, and ensured that children received consistent, nutritious diets. Responsiveness to feedback reinforced a sense of dignity for vulnerable groups in crisis conditions.

195.   Although WFP did not lead on gender mainstreaming at the policy level, its role was constructive in ensuring that the national social protection system could deliver inclusively and effectively for those most at risk. RESTART prioritized training for social assistants under included modules on domestic violence prevention, GBV sensitivity, and communication with vulnerable groups. Although WFP did not advocate for prioritizing training on gender and inclusion, its contributions in financing and motivating staff, supplying digital tools, and supporting trainings indirectly strengthened government capacity to address gender inequality and child-specific vulnerabilities.[180] For example, the ability of social assistants to detect early signs of domestic violence or to register refugee children consistently in the system reduced risks that disproportionately affect women and children. At the same time, the reform improved transparency and data flows, giving MLSP better oversight of how vulnerable groups —including refugees— were being reached.

196.   It is important to note that policy-level gender mainstreaming and design of gender-sensitive frameworks remained within the technical leadership of UN Women and UNFPA. WFP's role was complementary, focused on ensuring that the delivery systems functioned inclusively and that vulnerable categories were effectively reached. Furthermore, as WFP activities did not extend to livelihoods there was limited scope to mainstream women's empowerment.

2.4.4 What factors influenced WFP's ability to achieve or not achieve the intended objective of enhancing inclusive and shock-responsive social protection and food security systems and capacities of Government of Moldova?

Finding 19.   Moldova's upper-middle-income context—with its strong government leadership, digitalisation agenda, and high donor appetite—created an unusually conducive environment for WFP to contribute to social protection transformation, with WFP's flexibility emerging as a key

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[180] KIIs and FGDs with MLSP and social assistants.

comparative advantage over other agencies. However, progress across the humanitarian–development nexus was constrained by the need for longer-term engagement than WFP's timeframe allowed.

197.   **The Moldovan UMIC context provided an important set of contextual enablers for transformation** that WFP does not always benefit from. The country has taken extensive measures to foster its digitalization. The Government was keen to work with all partners. The MLSP ministers are generally young, driven, and very ambitious and among the Moldovan youth, there are lots of talents that can support transformation activities. Strategies are already in place to set the stage and guide the way forward and there is a significant donor appetite to support the transformation agenda. Many international organizations are contributing to MLSP transformation agenda in various capacities.[181]

198.   **A crucial comparative advantage of WFP proved to be its flexibility**. While several agencies possessed technical expertise in social protection, WFP was able to respond in a far more agile way in filling human resource gaps. This allowed them to accelerate progress towards a shared agenda. For example, WFP was able to second the RESTART coordinator to MLSP for three months as a bridge to a long-term UNICEF appointment. Similarly, while UNDP would have eventually conducted the assessment of MLSP MIS systems they appreciated WFP support which accelerated the progress to developing eSocial.

199.   **Constraints also existed around transitioning across the nexus**. The main donor is the European Commission, and their main priority is EU accession. The EU Delegation follows the development of RESTART and conditions support under their Growth Plan for Moldova to benchmarks support to on these reforms. However, these indicators did not align to the WFP push towards SRSP and poverty reduction. Other donors were more focused on refugee response and temporary protection leaving limited direct donor support. It was also apparent that these processes of change require long-term engagement and WFP needed to identify discrete contributions to on-going processes led by other actors.

2.4.5 How far have WFP interventions built the capacity of the MLSP social assistance systems to deliver support to vulnerable populations over the medium to longer term?

Finding 20.   WFP has taken a deliberately sustainability-focused approach to system-strengthening in Moldova by aligning investments with government priorities, designing "no regrets" deliverables with standalone value and developing post-production pathways—particularly for digital tools—to ensure long-term institutionalisation. However, the continuity of these solutions ultimately depends on government IT capacity and resourcing, which remain limited despite mitigation efforts through partnerships.

200.   WFP has conducted thoughtful analysis and design to ensure sustainability of system-strengthening interventions from the start. This ensures aligning closely with Government priorities and key reforms, coordinating with partners, and making considered choices on where to prioritise funding in light of the pathway to a sustainable exit from Moldova. The WFP Social Protection Offer was "*designed to mitigate many of the contextual uncertainties in Moldova, prepare and execute a WFP country exit strategy whilst ensuring that the MLSP is strengthened and WFP leaves behind deliverables of value over the longer-term*".[182] The Offer outlines the concept of 'no regrets' deliverables which means that the standalone value of the deliverables is not compromised even when there are changes in the context, such as changes in political direction.

201.   Project concept notes supporting MOUs with MLSP reinforce this commitment to sustainability.[183] In particular, WFP has designed a post-production pathway for all digital solutions to support sustainability. This includes the production, publication and dissemination of operational manuals, alongside the launch of e-learning tools. These steps are seen as critical to ensuring that solutions can be maintained and institutionalized beyond WFP's involvement.

202.   This thoughtful approach can be demonstrated as technical assistance that has standalone value has been prioritised, recognising that what WFP can achieve in the short-term in supporting the reform of

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[181] WFP, 2023f
[182] WFP (2024d)
[183] E.g. WFP (2024e)

Ajutor Social is limited. For example, in creating the Ajutor Social dashboard, WFP has been cognisant that the SIASS information system currently uses very old technology and is not sustainable in its current state. Therefore, the Ajutor Social dashboard has been developed as a temporary solution, until eSocial, the new digital information platform that is being supported by UNDP, is launched and a decision is made about the SIAAS redesign or upgrade. Although the current Ajutor Social dashboard will not be compatible with eSocial, it has been created to demonstrate the power of data to support management decisions within MLSP. In this case, it is an overall concept or idea that has been demonstrated that can be lifted by MLSP in the future, once a new information system is in place.

203. WFP has addressed key issues with the sustainability of UAHelp (see Box 2 above) which was rapidly established in 2022 to link RAC managers to resources in warehouses and subsequently support the registration of RHHs. WFP and UNHCR advised on the legislation required to adopt UAHelp as a nationally recognised and supported module. This allowed UAHelp to be integrated into the national cloud (M-Cloud) and national data exchange platform (eConnect) which WFP subsequently facilitated. Connecting UAHelp to other government databases supports the verification of beneficiaries, case management and the referral of beneficiaries to other Government programmes – all of which promotes ownership and commitment to sustainability. Other activities to support long-term sustainability of UAHelp, including enabling access for key MLSP staff and training staff on how to use the platform, are still in progress.

204. WFP has also considered how to **ensure long-term sustainability of training activities for MLSP staff**, particularly those that support the sustainability of digital tools. WFP has supported in-person training providing direct financial incentives for staff to participate in trainings. However, WFP is now working with the MLSP to consider how the existing eGov e-learning platform can be used to create low-cost training modules that remain within the MLSP system long-term, and in particular support the adoption of new digital tools for which skills cannot effectively be delivered through traditional workshop-based training modules alone. This support has also included consideration of how to make provision of incentives to MLSP staff more sustainable, including the integration of satisfactory training completion into staff performance evaluations. However, MLSP staff expressed the view that not all topics are suitable for online modules, and the concern that some of the frontline staff do not have sufficient digital skills to successfully access online trainings.

205. Several challenges to the sustainability of WFP support were noted. In particular, the sustainability of digital tools depends heavily on IT capacities and budgets within MLSP. There is a shortage of qualified teams to design and run the digitalization program in a "Ministry Led" sustainable approach and over-reliance on donors to hire temporary resources to support digitalization efforts.[184] These risks have been recognised by WFP and an agreement exists for UNDP to strengthen the core IT capacities of MLSP.

2.5. How have WFP activities been designed and conducted to facilitate a responsible exit by WFP?

2.5.1 How has the approach to a responsible exit evolved over time, and in the nature of WFP partnerships and the use of WFP's corporate toolbox?

Finding 21. **WFP's engagement in Moldova was intentionally designed as a time-bound response with a clear commitment to responsible exit, and the Country Office progressively refined its transition strategy as operational maturity increased. However, the absence of corporate guidance on how to close an entire operation required the CO to innovate its own transition model, highlighting both strong internal leadership and the need for institutionalised exit frameworks across WFP.**

206. **WFP engaged in Moldova with a targeted and time-bound response to the war in Ukraine and clear focus on exiting**. All partners were clear that WFP had communicated from the very beginning its intentions for a responsible exit, although the specificities on timeline and strategy for exit took time to mature.

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[184] WFP (2023f)

207. The presence of WFP in Moldova was conceptualised by the CO as having four phases, with an evolving approach towards exit. Each phase has distinct staffing structures, aligning with the programme orientation and approach at that time. This is demonstrated in Figure 33.

Figure 33 Evolution of WFP presence in Moldova

Source: Mokoro, drawing on WFP, 2025g and Naranjilla, 2025

208. As the timeline in the figure above shows, WFP Moldova operations have evolved through each phase and the conceptualization of approaches for responsible exit has matured, moving towards the strategy that system-strengthening activities should be gradually scaled up as the model for sustainable exit.

209. The WFP CO came to realise that **the elaboration of the model for sustainable exit takes time**, especially in light of the time taken to build a CO with sufficient capacity for strategic decision making. The development of the ICSP, and the introduction of a CD and other key strategic positions, enabled WFP to

develop the concept of exit through a focus on the social protection system-strengthening and strategic partnerships. The exit timeframe has been extended by a year beyond the original ICSP design, which was initially intended to end in February 2026. This reflects the ambitious design in executing transition as well as a commitment to a responsible exit.

210.   The conceptualization of exit continues to evolve. The CO acknowledge that **there are a range of ways that WFP can exit from activities.**[185] First, as is prominent in the plans for handover under the T-ICSP, WFP can transition activities to Government. Second, through strategic partnerships, WFP can handover activities to partners and other national actors, such as other United Nations agencies, who are in Moldova for the long-term. Finally, activities can also be closed down completely. While MLSP has remained the primary partner throughout, ultimately the approach being taken by WFP to transition programming has evolved to include a mix of all three of these handover strategies. A number of activities will not be handed to Government but will be taken up by other United Nations agencies.

211.   **WFP is not adequately equipped with a corporate toolbox to support the transition**. The CO has had to innovate along the way, with support from both the Regional Office and HQ. Corporately there is guidance for closure of field offices but there are no clear procedures for closing down a whole operation in a responsible way, ensuring appropriate handover to partners.

212.   For WFP in Moldova, exit has been a choice and therefore it has been possible to put in place the conditions necessary to facilitate a sustainable exit rather than a closure as funds are expended. This includes synchronizing the staffing structure and financial resources with the timeline for exit, with the CO planning ahead with a contingency budget to cover the costs of transition.

213.   In February 2025, a year ahead of the initially planned exit date, a Transition Task Force was created in the CO who have meetings every two weeks to monitor progress against a transition matrix. WFP has created a detailed matrix that itemizes tasks for transition under each programme area, as well as support functions such as HR, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, security and partnerships. WFP staff noted learning about obstacles faced in the process towards closure. For example, as key functions are lost within the staff, business processes (e.g. approvals) must be reassigned and the responsibilities for different working groups within the CO need to be amended. This reassignment of tasks creates a large burden on individuals as the procedural tasks do not reduce in line with the reducing country presence and staffing.

214.   While **there is agreement within WFP that the CO should close,** there was debate on whether there is a justification for maintaining a minimal country presence. For example, this might involve embedding a few WFP staff within another United Nations agency or downgrading the presence to a field office of the Ukraine operation. Arguments for extending a country presence included as a contingency against increased needs from either the Ukraine crisis or an increase in needs on the Left Bank, and to provide administrative assistance to the Ukraine operation. However, this needs to be balanced against WFP's proven capacity to rapidly establish an operation, as well as the established national response capacities.

2.5.2 What contextual factors were critical to the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Moldova approach to transition and exit?

Finding 22.   Moldova's mature institutional environment, strong government leadership and conducive policy framework enabled WFP to undertake capacity-strengthening activities throughout its engagement in Moldova, first alongside emergency delivery and then with an increasingly strong focus in the transition away from emergency response—a scenario more feasible than in typical WFP contexts. Strategic early choices, strong partnerships and humanitarian funding flexibility allowed WFP to support national systems effectively; however, localization ambitions were not fully realised.

215.   **Moldova is a particularly unique context for WFP**. As an UMIC country, it represents a far more mature development context than WFP typically operates in, making a short-term presence in the country feasible. WFP's initial entry was intended to alleviate the immediate burden caused by the refugee influx from Ukraine. Given the existence of established government systems, including information systems for social protection and delivery mechanisms such as Posta Moldovei, this initial emergency response was relatively

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[185] This includes both direct assistance through cash transfers and hot meals and technical assistance activities.

straightforward. A conducive policy environment and the clear priorities set out in the Social Assistance Systems Reform (RESTART) created opportunities for WFP and other United Nations agencies to provide targeted support that aligned with national objectives and strengthened national social protection system laying the groundwork for a responsible and sustainable exit. This is unlike many other contexts where WFP operates where WFP can often be faced with the challenge of complete system reform, due to limitations of national systems and poverty frameworks, and domestic resource and financing gaps.[186]

216. **The initial choices made by WFP in the early phases of delivery also provided the optimal environment** for which WFP could meet system-strengthening objectives, as a pathway for sustainable exit. WFP's decision to support vulnerable Moldovans was unanticipated, particularly given the existing social protection initiatives in the country. However, this support leveraged a strong partnership with MLSP and demonstrated a strong technical skillset for the delivery of cash assistance and for strengthening the social protection system.

217. **WFP developed strong and strategic partnerships from the outset**. Proactive coordination with the Government and United Nations partners helped demarcate roles and forms of assistance early in the response, laying the foundation for strategic collaboration. WFP's clear and open communication regarding its exit strategy was also widely appreciated by partners. For example, WFP's close collaboration with UNDP across multiple workstreams in digitalization initiatives, such as the development of the SRSP module, has directly supported the transition. Such collaboration will enable UNDP and other partners to continue clearly defined strands of work after WFP's exit, without creating burdensome handover processes.

218. Strategic plans also made reference to supporting the Grand Bargain's 'localization' agenda (cited also in WFP's country capacity-strengthening policy) to complement investment in Government authorities with local NGOs.[187] The 2024 Social Protection Offer suggested that localization efforts will be promoted wherever possible, working to identify CSOs and build their capacity to be able to partner directly with local government and local social protection agencies to make up for critical gaps in the local social workforce. However, there is limited evidence that WFP invested in system-strengthening local NGOs.

219. **The robust funding allocated to WFP in Moldova has facilitated an efficient and well-considered transition process**. First, WFP has managed to leverage humanitarian funds to initiate longer-term social protection system-strengthening objectives. WFP's approach aligned with the humanitarian-development-nexus, supporting the transition away from humanitarian assistance, and aligning closely with donor priorities to ensure a responsible transition to national systems. Secondly, early visibility of the funding pipeline, with good funding against the needs-based plan (Figure 26), has enabled optimal fund management by WFP. While it is recognized that WFP Moldova is unlikely to sustain these funding levels beyond the ICSP due to shifts in the international funding landscape, the decision to exit was made proactively ahead of the anticipated decline. This timing ensured sufficient operational funds were available to support the exit and allowed WFP to set a clear deadline, enabling structured pipeline management and transition planning.

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[186] Naranjilla (2025)
[187] O'Brien (2023)

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1. Conclusions

220.   The evaluation conclusions are based on the preceding findings. The findings supporting each conclusion are mapped in Annex 7.

Conclusion 1: WFP rapidly established itself as a credible actor in Moldova, delivering timely and effective assistance while strategically aligning with national systems.

221.   WFP succeeded in scaling up cash-based transfers within weeks of its arrival, despite having no prior footprint in the country—an impressive operational achievement. The transfers were appropriate and effective for both refugees and vulnerable Moldovans. WFP rapidly mobilised short-term staff, despite high turnover and an initially ad hoc structure.

222.   A core strength of WFP's approach was its early decision to align cash delivery mechanisms with existing government structures—either through direct top-ups to Ajutor Social or by mirroring national processes in parallel refugee-focused schemes. This generated efficiency gains in targeting, registration, and verification, while also laying the groundwork for future integration into national systems.

223.   However, such alignment required careful management of risks. Social registries needed to be assessed for inclusivity, and reliance on government transfer values sometimes meant balancing affordability with adequacy. While alignment was appropriate in Moldova's context, WFP should remain vigilant in other contexts where divergence from national systems may be necessary to uphold humanitarian standards.

Conclusion 2: WFP's alignment of CBT delivery with national systems was successfully leveraged to provide meaningful and well-received contributions to strengthening MLSP cash delivery chains. These activities were well aligned with WFP's timeframe and digitalization emerged as a particularly impactful contribution. WFP lacked a clear comparative advantage in promoting gender equality and social inclusion.

224.   By embedding its assistance within government systems, WFP not only improved efficiency in the short term but also positioned itself as a trusted partner in system-strengthening. WFP CBT processes were timely, secure and accessible and continued to improve over time. The proximity to national systems granted WFP access to identify operational bottlenecks and enabled it to provide system support that was both context-specific and highly valued by the MLSP.

225.   Even in the context of an UMIC with well-established social protection system WFP was able to contribute technical assistance to strengthen the national protection system. These efforts to improve delivery mechanisms aligned well with the Government's RESTART reform priorities. They were actively welcomed as they minimized, rather than exacerbated, budgetary pressures. Furthermore, the activities were identified, designed and completed within the cycle of WFP's engagement in country.

226.   The most tangible and sustainable results in strengthening delivery chains of existing programmes are found in WFP's digitalization support. Tools such as the Ajutor Social performance dashboard, risk dashboards, and related training have already demonstrated—or are poised to deliver—significant gains in efficiency, oversight, and accountability. While some require further work to ensure long-term viability, they represent a clear institutional legacy for WFP's engagement. Conversely challenges in supporting decentralized services such as social canteens underscore that WFP's comparative advantage lies in strengthening central delivery systems rather than pursuing capacity development across diffuse local structures.

227.   Given the strength of the national social protection system, cash-based social assistance was broadly effective in reaching women and other groups disproportionately affected by gendered

vulnerabilities. However, WFP did not undertake a substantive gender and inclusion analysis which could have helped improve access for marginalised groups including the Roma. While there was not a substantive discussion of WFP's potential role in strengthening the use of social assistance in contributing to gender transformative or empowerment-focused outcomes, and other UN agencies demonstrated a stronger comparative advantage in leading this work in Moldova.

Conclusion 3: WFP positioned itself to support policy and programme reform, but progress on system-level changes was constrained by its short operational timeframe. Success depended heavily on government interest, and WFP was most effective when contributing flexibly to longer-term efforts led by other partners.

228.   WFP's system-strengthening ambitions extended beyond improving delivery efficiency to pursuing broader system change — such as expanding coverage to refugees and strengthening national shock responsiveness — which clearly aligned with its mandate. Building the system system should ultimately reduce the need for WFP to respond to future crises. However, these reforms require long-term engagement, making them difficult to fully advance within WFP's limited operational cycle in Moldova.

229.   Government ownership proved essential. Where WFP aligned with strong government priorities — such as the RESTART reforms or elements of the refugee response — progress was quicker. For example, MLSP welcomed the enhanced response capacities to respond to the consequences of the influx of refugees. In contrast, areas like SRSP required significant advocacy before technical work could even begin, leaving limited time for implementation.

230.   WFP recognized that many system-level reforms would extend beyond its presence in country, and made deliberate efforts to embed work within longer-term partners. Where WFP reinforced existing plans — for example, contributing to UNDP-led digitalization — sustainability prospects were strong. However, in areas where WFP itself drove the agenda, and a handover of responsibilities needs to be negotiated, prospects for successful outcomes are inevitably more uncertain.

231.   Ultimately, WFP's agility and opportunism allowed it to seize windows of opportunity when they emerged — a key comparative advantage in fast-evolving policy environments.

Conclusion 4: Technical assistance alone cannot drive system-level reform; it must be paired with solutions to financial and political barriers. WFP contributed meaningfully by promoting coordination and helping link government to broader development financing.

232.   Moldova's experience underscores that while technical improvements are valuable, system change ultimately depends on political will and fiscal space. While technical assistance led to efficiency gains in Ajutor Social this was not used, as assumed, to create room for expanding coverage to refugees and vulnerable Moldovans, as savings were redirected to other government priorities. The Government consistently cited financial constraints as the main obstacle to broader inclusion. While there was openness to integrating refugees and strengthening poverty mitigation measures, there was clear reluctance to assume these costs within the national budget without external funding.

233.   WFP acknowledged these limitations and sought innovative solutions — for example, facilitating access to development finance for the MLSP. WFP's role in convening and energizing coordination platforms, particularly within the refugee response nexus, has been particularly influential in creating the conditions for collective action. However, sustained system reform will ultimately require commitment and investment from influential development partners such as the EU or international financial institutions.

Conclusion 5: WFP's contribution to social protection system-strengthening was enabled by early strategic choices and flexible institutional systems. However, a faster transition from emergency response to longer-term engagement could have improved the depth of results.

234.   The CO's early decision to adopt a cash-based response was pivotal — not only because it aligned with market assessments, but because it shaped the entire strategic trajectory of WFP in Moldova. Choosing CBTs led WFP to partner directly with MLSP as its core counterpart, rather than following a more food-systems path that may have aligned it with the Ministry of Agriculture. This, in turn, influenced staffing profiles and

equipped the CO with the right expertise to pivot towards social protection. A clear early agreement with UNHCR on roles—WFP focusing on vulnerable Moldovans—further solidified this partnership with MLSP.

235.   WFP's internal systems also proved adaptable. Despite its emergency orientation, WFP used flexible budgeting, HR, and procurement mechanisms to balance humanitarian delivery with emerging system-strengthening roles. While it did not necessarily bring unique technical expertise compared to other development actors, its speed and flexibility made it a preferred government partner.

236.   However, progress was slowed by the length of the transition from the emergency-focused LEO to the capacity-strengthening-oriented ICSP. Although the T-ICSP helped maintain strategic direction, sustained progress only accelerated once a full-time lead was appointed under the ICSP. Earlier onboarding of longer-term staff — without waiting for the formal ICSP — could have enabled a more substantive system-strengthening portfolio within the limited timeframe available.

Conclusion 6: The limited refugee caseload justifies WFP's decision to exit direct operations in Moldova, and the CO's deliberate approach to a responsible transition offers valuable corporate learning.

237.   WFP was clear from the outset that its presence in Moldova would be temporary and focused on the refugee crisis. Given the steep decline in refugee numbers and Moldova's UMIC status—which implies national capacity to meet residual needs — the decision to phase out direct assistance is appropriate. While system-strengthening has been appreciated in concert with direct transfers was appreciated, this responsibility should logically transition fully to other development agencies at this juncture. While there may be arguments for maintaining a light contingency presence or providing on-going support to the Ukraine operation, this question fell outside of the scope of this evaluation.

238.   The CO has approached exit planning with commendable responsibility. Where activities are nearing completion, WFP is investing in "post-production" measures such as manuals and online training to institutionalize capacity. For unfinished capacity-strengthening initiatives, WFP has proactively identified successor agencies, notably UNDP and UNICEF, although the extent of their future commitment is unknown.

239.   WFP's institutional experience with responsible exit is limited, and Moldova highlights the need for clearer corporate guidance. Early lessons indicate that responsible transition requires significantly more time and structured staffing and activity drawdown than a simple closure, underscoring the need for corporate frameworks to support future exits.

3.2. Lesson Learnt

240. The evaluation identified a significant number of important learnings from the work of WFP in Moldova. These are summarised in the figure below and elaborated further in Annex 10:

Figure 34 Lessons learnt: factors contributing to the entry to exit journey of WFP in Moldova

Factors contributing to the entry to exit journey of WFP in Moldova

Strategic positioning shapes responsible exit

- CBT only delivery through national systems from day one positioned WFP as a strategic partner to strengthen the social protection system.
- Over the four phases, capacity strengthening scaled up to enable sustainable withdrawal.
- Sustainability starts at design, through rigorous analysis and prioritization of standalone technical deliverables with lasting utility.
- Post-production pathways, plus manuals and e-learning, help sustain national knowledge, systems, and capacity beyond WFP's exit.

Integrated refugee and host population responses foster inclusive national systems and lead the way to exit

- Early agreement on division of roles between WFP (gap-filling support) and UNHCR (cash to refugees) was mutually beneficial and seen as good practice.
- WFP supported MLSP to respond to refugee needs, including developing and handing over the UAHelp MIS to manage refugee integration into MLSP programmes.
- Staff expertise supported contribution to identifying refugee financing solutions, complementing technical assistance to increase prospects for national ownership.

Capacity strengthening is the foundation of responsible exit

- Enabling context (mature institutions, strong government leadership, conducive policy framework) allowed a rapid shift from emergency delivery to capacity strengthening as a pathway to exit.
- WFP flexibility was a key competitive advantage in delivering capacity strengthening.
- Exit pathways include transition to government ownership, handover to longer-term partners, or closure once objectives are met.

Partnerships enhance speed and sustainability of capacity strengthening and support exit

- Short WFP timeframes limited how far systemic reforms could be realised (e.g. refugee inclusion and stronger shock responsiveness).
- Strategic partnerships and WFP coordination leadership were crucial to sustainability, handover and exit.
- Alignment with government priorities and reform processes strengthened sustainability and continuity.

Well adapted strategic planning processes and support services support responsible exit

- LEO to ICSP transition slowed progress; an earlier shift and earlier longer-term recruitment could have expanded capacity strengthening.
- Staffing and funds were synchronised to the exit timeline, with a contingency budget to keep the transition deliberate and coordinated.
- Robust funding and RO/HQ support enabled an efficient transition
- Limited corporate guidance highlighted the need for a transition toolbox.

3.3. Recommendations

241.   The following recommendations are made in relation to the remainder of the ICSP as well as how the learnings from Moldova may be leveraged corporately.

	Short/ medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/ entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/ medium	By when
Recommendation 1: **In advance of the planned WFP exit from Moldova, the Country Office (CO) should focus on embedding and sustaining system-strengthening activities within national institutions and capturing key learnings to inform corporate practice.**					
1.1 WFP should complete all system-strengthening activities in line with the timeframe for closing the CO in early 2026. *This reflects Conclusions 2 and 6 on (i) the benefits of linking technical assistance with direct transfers, and (ii) the appropriateness of phasing out direct transfers.*	Short-Term	WFP CO		High	End Feb 2026
1.2 In this remaining programme period the WFP CO should prioritise the implementation of (i) "post production" activities to ensure the successful transfer of system-strengthening activities, and (ii) support to inter-agency and Government coordination efforts to transition of refugee support from humanitarian, to development, sources of finance, whilst (iii) putting in place handover plans to the government and WFP partners. *This draws on Conclusions 1 and 2 on the value of WFP's system-strengthening work, Conclusion 4 on supporting the transition of responsibilities across the nexus, and Conclusion 3 on tailoring and prioritizing activities to WFP's operational timeline.*	Short-Term	WFP CO		High	End Feb 2026

	Short/ medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/ entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/ medium	By when
1.3 The CO should prioritize knowledge management plan actions to capture key lessons from Moldova in relation to its system-strengthening work, to fill gaps in WFP corporate technical guidance. *This is based on Conclusions 1 and 2, which highlight the innovative contributions to capacity strengthening, whilst Conclusions 3 and 4 highlight limitations to the contribution of WFP.*	Short-Term	WFP CO	Global Headquarters (GHQ) School Meals and Social Protection	High	End Feb 2026
1.4 The CO should develop products capturing the entry-to-exit best practice across programme and support services including development of an entry-to-exit model for WFP Country Office in similar contexts and Standard Operating Procedures for CO Transition and Closure. *This is based on Conclusion 6 that the CO's deliberate approach to a responsible transition and exit offers valuable corporate learning.*	Short-Term	WFP CO	Relevant GHQ units/divisions/services	High	End April 2026
Recommendation 2: WFP HQ should draw on the lessons from Moldova to support the delivery of the WFP Strategic Plan for 2026-2029, including Strategic Outcome 1 (Effective emergency preparedness and response) and Strategic outcome 3 (Enabled government and partner programmes)					
2.1 Update CSP guidance related to CSP design, particularly applicable to MIC and protracted humanitarian and displacement contexts, and key features on the rollout of programme and support services from the opening to closure of a CO. *This is based on Conclusion 5 on the importance of speeding the transition from emergency response to longer-term engagement and contribution of flexible budgeting, HR, and procurement mechanisms.*	Medium-Term	CO and relevant GHQ units/divisions/services		High	End 2027

	Short/ medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/ entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/ medium	By when
2.2 Update specific tools and procedures related to the Global Footprint Review supporting COs to proactively transition out of direct assistance to government systems, and, to manage a responsible exit and closure of COs. *This is based on Conclusion 6, which emphasizes the limited institutional experience that WFP has with responsible exit and the need for clearer corporate processes.*	Medium-Term	CO and relevant GHQ units/divisions/services		High	End 2027
2.3 Using best practice from the Moldova CO, support Global Headquarters to strengthen areas of WFP technical guidance currently under revision or development, and to identify potential needs for clarification or new corporate guidance. To pay attention in particular to: transitioning direct assistance to social protection programmes including the use of digital technologies; management of protracted refugee caseloads; application of SRSP to protracted displacement and crisis contexts, and; innovations in the training of Government social workforce. *This draws on Conclusion 6 on gaps in corporate guidance, Conclusion 5 on broader lessons for WFP's approach to system-strengthening and transitions, and Conclusion 3 on the need for long-term engagement, strong government ownership, and partner alignment for system-level reform.*	Short-Term	CO and GHQ School Meals and Social Protection	GHQ Programme Policy and Guidance Division, Emergency Preparedness and Guidance Division	High	End 2027

Annex 1.   Summary terms of reference

These terms of reference are for the activity evaluation of social protection and cash-based transfer activities in the WFP Moldova transitional and interim country strategic plans. This evaluation is commissioned by WFP Moldova Country Office covers the period from March 2022 to May 2025. These activities are implemented in all the *raions* (districts) of the country and focussing on the Ministry of Labour and Social protection.

Subject and focus of the evaluation

WFP has been present in Moldova since March 2022, working under Ukraine Limited Emergency Operation (March – August 2022) in alignment with the Regional Refugee Response Plan for Ukraine (March – August 2022) to deliver life-saving assistance to refugees and vulnerable Moldovan communities hosting refugees. Under the transitional interim country strategic plan (T-ICSP) (2022-2023), WFP supported the Government of Moldova with the emergency response to the conflict, while expanding efforts to address structural issues and increasing needs of refugee and host communities. Under the interim country strategic plan (2024-2026), WFP continued to meet the needs of refugees, host communities, and vulnerable Moldovan households directly and indirectly affected by the war. WFP aimed to accelerate the transition from emergency response towards strengthening national social protection systems, extending their reach to support refugees, and providing a safety net for impoverished Moldovans.

The shift in the ICSP (2024-2026) was strategic, demand driven, but also responsive to changes in the response context. This was conceived with an express objective to engage in a process to close the Country Operation at the end of the ICSP in 2026. The ICSP focuses on three mutually reinforcing Strategic Outcomes in the areas of crisis response (SO1), institutional capacity strengthening (SO2) and service provision (SO3), contributing to the achievement of SDGs 2 and 17.

Objectives and stakeholders of the evaluation

WFP evaluations serve the dual objectives of accountability and learning. The evaluation will seek the views of, and be useful to, a broad range of WFP internal and external stakeholders. A number of stakeholders will play a role in the evaluation process in light of their role in the design and implementation of the social protection capacity strengthening and cash assistance activities, their interest in the results of the evaluation and relative power to influence the design, funding and implementation of the programme being evaluated.

Key evaluation questions

The evaluation will address the following four six questions:

Question 1: To what extent are WFP interventions relevant to meeting the needs of the vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and of MLSP?

Question 2: How coherent have WFP interventions been with broader social protection policies and programmes in Moldova and how has WFP ensured synergies between its cash-based transfers (CBT) and social protection capacity strengthening support?

Question 3: To what extent have WFP's capacity strengthening, food and cash assistance interventions been efficient to meet the needs of vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and national social protection systems?

Question 4: To what extent have WFP interventions contributed to, or are they expected to contribute to, strengthening the institutional capacities of the MLSP to address the essential needs of vulnerable population in Moldova?

Question 5: How have WFP activities been designed and conducted to facilitate a responsible exit by WFP?

Question 6: To what extent can the WFP Moldova model be applied in other similar contexts (high level refugee crisis/response in upper middle-income countries, protracted humanitarian situations, political instability shocks)?

The evaluation should include a country case study as a stand-alone deliverable presented as an annex to the evaluation report. Expanding on answers to key questions related to relevance, efficiency and effectiveness, the aim of the case study is to narrate how WFP moved through its different phases of country presence, from establishment of WFP Moldova as an area office for the Ukraine emergency response, to identifying its added value compared with other partners whilst providing technical assistance to the government in a context of protracted humanitarian crisis, towards the planned responsible exit in 2026. The country case study will place equal importance on the contribution of programme and support services. The case study will be expected to pay attention throughout to the way that WFP's work was adapted to respond to the specific context, including the particularities of the acute emergency phase as compared with the protracted crisis, and the context of displaced populations; and the implications of working in a middle-income country with long established social protection systems and programmes.

Scope, methodology and ethical considerations

Given the learning objective of the evaluation, the evaluation methods should be participatory. This means early identification of primary intended users of evaluation including beneficiaries and engaging them throughout the process. The methodology should be aimed at developing a credible contribution story of WFP's intervention, alongside other relevant actors and factors, including any unintended effects on policies, systems, and beneficiaries that were not foreseen during programme design.

The methodology chosen should demonstrate attention to impartiality and reduction of bias by relying on mixed methods (quantitative, qualitative, participatory etc.) and different primary and secondary data sources that are systematically triangulated (documents from different sources; a range of stakeholder groups, including beneficiaries; direct observation in different locations; across evaluators; across methods etc.).

The methodology should be sensitive in terms of GEWE, equity and inclusion, indicating how the perspectives and voices of diverse groups (men, women, boys, girls, the elderly, people living with disabilities, Roma community and other marginalized groups) will be sought and considered.

The evaluation conforms to WFP and 2020 UNEG ethical guidelines. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring informed consent, protecting privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of participants, ensuring cultural sensitivity, respecting the autonomy of participants, ensuring fair recruitment of participants (including women and socially excluded groups) and ensuring that the evaluation results in no harm to participants or their communities.

Roles and responsibilities

Evaluation Team: The ET is expected to include four members, including the team leader, with a mix of national/regional and international evaluator(s) with relevant expertise. To the extent possible, the evaluation will be conducted by a gender, geographically, culturally and linguistically diverse and balanced team who can effectively cover the areas of evaluation. The ET should have good knowledge of gender, equity, wider inclusion issues and, to the extent possible, power dynamics.

Evaluation Manager: WFP's Evaluation Manager acts as the main interlocutor between the ET, represented by the team leader, the firm's focal point, and WFP counterparts to ensure a smooth implementation process. The EM ensures quality assurance mechanisms are operational and effectively used.

An **internal Evaluation Committee** (EC) is formed to steer the evaluation process and ensure it is independent and impartial. The roles and responsibilities of the EC include overseeing the evaluation process, making key decisions and reviewing evaluation products.

Stakeholders: WFP stakeholders at country, regional and HQ level are expected to engage throughout the evaluation process to ensure a high degree of utility and transparency. External stakeholders, such as beneficiaries, government, donors, NGO partners and other UN agencies will be consulted during the evaluation process.

Communication

Preliminary findings will be shared with WFP stakeholders in the Country Office and the Regional Bureau during a debriefing session at the end of the data collection phase. A country stakeholder workshop will be held between July and September 2025 to ensure a transparent evaluation process and promote ownership of the findings and preliminary recommendations by country stakeholders. Evaluation findings will be actively disseminated and the final evaluation report will be publicly available on WFP's website.

Timing and key milestones

Inception Phase: May – July 2025

Data Collection: July – August 2025

Reporting: August – October 2025

Stakeholder Workshop – October 2025

Annex 2. Detailed timeline

Phase	Main activities (shaded denotes fieldwork)	Timing
Phase 1: Inception		
Mobilisation, preliminary document gathering and desk review	Team preparation, literature review prior to briefing	From 26th May
Inception Briefings	Remote inception briefings, with MENAEERO support as needed	From 26th May
Inception mission	In-country inception mission, including ToC workshop	9 - 13th June
Drafting Inception Report	Preparation of inception report including a detailed evaluation delivery plan, approach, methodology, and tools; draft report submitted for quality review; revisions incorporated. Case study as an annex.	**Draft 0 submitted to WFP on 27th June**
Designing the case study approach	Elaborating the methodology for the case study, to be integrated into the overall IR	
	Quality assure draft IR by EM and MENAEERO using QC	*14th July*
Revisions to draft IR (inclusive of the case study approach as annex)	Revise draft IR and case study approach based on feedback received by EM and MENAEERO	**21st July**
	Draft IR reviewed by quality support service (DEQS) and ERG	**31st July**
Final Inception Report, incorporating WFP comments	WFP and ERG comments on draft IR, revisions incorporated into final Inception Report	**Final IR submitted on 7th August**
Phase 2: Data collection		
In-depth data gathering and analysis	Further document review, preliminary analysis; country fieldwork preparation	From 1st August
Data collection	In-country data collection and debrief.	11th - 22nd August
Exit debrief	Internal workshop to discuss findings - conducted remotely	w/c 1st September
	Preliminary findings presentation with WFP CO – conducted remotely	9th September
Phase 3: Reporting		
Analysis and synthesis	Analysis and synthesis of findings	**Draft 0 ER (including Case Study)**
Drafting of Evaluation Report	Preparation of first draft evaluation report; draft submitted for quality review; revisions incorporated. Draft evaluation report.	
Drafting of the case study	Case study as an annex to the evaluation report.	

		submitted on 19 September
	Quality assurance of draft ER by EM and MENAEERO using the QC	
Revisions to draft ER	Revise and submit draft ER and case study based on feedback received by EM and MENAEERO	**Draft 1 ER submitted on 3 October**
	Share draft ER with quality support service (DEQS) and organize follow-up call with DEQS, if required. ERG to review and comment on draft ER	*2 weeks*
Revisions to draft ER	Revise and submit draft ER and case study based on feedback received by DEQS and ERG	**Draft 2 ER submitted on 24 October**
Learning workshop	Remote stakeholder workshop	w/c 27 October
Final ER	Finalise draft ER and case study based on feedback received.	**Final ER submitted on 5 November**

Annex 3.   Methodology

1.   This annex elaborates on key elements of the methodological approach used during this evaluation to collect, analyse data and draft findings, conclusions and recommendations. A summary of the methodology is already presented in section 1.4. This annex does not duplicate what has already been presented.

Table 9. Main evaluation questions and sub-questions

Evaluation Question	Evaluation Criteria	Link to ToC assumptions
Evaluation Question EQ1 – To what extent are WFP interventions relevant to meeting the needs of the vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and of MLSP?		
1.1 Was the design of the intervention relevant and did it remain relevant to the wider Moldovan context, the underlying structural issues underpinning vulnerability and the impact of the influx of refugees?	Relevance	13. Organisational flexibility exists to move from direct transfers to a capacity strengthening role. 11. Willingness amongst all partners to channel international cash assistance through national systems.
1.2 To what extent did the intervention plan to address the specific needs and priorities of refugees?	Relevance	10. Refugee and host population needs accurately assessed. 15. WFP does not have responsibility for promoting the inclusion of refugees in national SP systems.
1.3 To what extent did the intervention plan to address the specific needs and priorities of vulnerable Moldovans?	Relevance	10. Refugee and host population needs accurately assessed
1.4 How well was the intervention designed to address the relevant needs and priorities of the MLSP supported by WFP?	Relevance	6. Agreement between partners on capacity strengthening need and priorities
Evaluation Question EQ2 – How coherent have WFP interventions been with broader social protection policies and programmes in Moldova and how has WFP ensured synergies between its cash-based transfers (CBT) and social protection capacity strengthening support?		
2.1 How well has WFP's social protection intervention aligned with the national social protection policies and reforms of the Government of Moldova implemented by the MLSP and other partners?	External coherence	15. WFP does not have responsibility for promoting the inclusion of refugees in national SP systems.
2.2 How complementary have WFP-designed CBT and social protection actions been to each other over the course of WFP presence in Moldova from the opening of the Country Office until preparations for responsible exit?	Internal coherence	12. Aligning WFP transfers with the national system provides an entry point for capacity strengthening
2.3 What have been the synergies between WFP interventions, UNSDCF and the government - United Nations refugee response managed under the Refugee Coordination Model?	Internal and External Coherence	5. WFP has a comparative advantage in capacity strengthening
Evaluation Question EQ3 – To what extent have WFP 's capacity strengthening, food and cash assistance interventions been efficient to meet the needs of vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and national social protection system?		

Evaluation Question	Evaluation Criteria	Link to ToC assumptions
3.1 To what extent have WFP CBT processes been timely, secure, and accessible?	Efficiency	
3.2 To what extent did the use of government systems contribute to WFP's ability to deliver assistance to vulnerable Moldovans and refugees, and what were the success factors / challenges?	Efficiency	9. National systems meet minimum efficiency and effectiveness standards. Data protection and privacy ensured. 7. WFP able to contract FSP used by Government to deliver social assistance 8. Data protection and privacy ensured.
3.3 How far has WFP social protection support contributed to improved efficiencies in the delivery of assistance to vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and to the functions of MLSP social assistance processes?	Efficiency	
3.4 To what extent and in what ways have WFP's institutional arrangements (HR processes, planning, financing, monitoring and reporting; etc.) facilitated or constrained the ability of WFP Moldova to deliver on its commitments to support strengthened social protection?	Efficiency	14. WFP support services adapted to a capacity strengthening role 3. Donors willing to support WFP Capacity Strengthening activities.
Evaluation Question EQ4 – To what extent have WFP interventions contributed to, or are they expected to contribute to, strengthening the institutional capacities of the MLSP and addressing the essential needs of vulnerable population in Moldova?		
4.1 To what extent have the multipurpose cash assistance to Moldovans and hot meals targeting refugees enabled beneficiaries to meet their essential needs?	Effectiveness	
4.2 To what extent is WFP support achieving its intended objective of enhancing inclusive and shock-responsive social protection and food security systems and capacities of Government of Moldova?	Effectiveness	1. Government receptive to technical assistance.
4.3 How did the social protection capacity strengthening and cash assistance activities address gender inequality and the special needs of children, vulnerable Moldovans and refugees?	Effectiveness	4. WFP can offer technical skills for capacity strengthening. 1. Government receptive to technical assistance.
4.4 What factors influenced WFP's ability to achieve or not achieve the intended objective of enhancing inclusive and shock-responsive social protection and food security systems and capacities of Government of Moldova?	Effectiveness	1. Government receptive to technical assistance.
4.5 How far have WFP interventions built the capacity of the MLSP social assistance systems to deliver support to vulnerable populations over the medium to longer term?	Effectiveness	1. Government receptive to technical assistance. 2. Political willingness to consider increasing coverage of social protection
Evaluation Question EQ5 – How have WFP activities been designed and conducted to facilitate a responsible exit by WFP?		
5.1 How has the approach to a responsible exit evolved over time, and in the nature of WFPs partnerships and the use of WFP's corporate toolbox?	Sustainability	12. Aligning WFP transfers with the national system provides an entry point for capacity strengthening 13. Organisational flexibility exists to move from direct transfers to a capacity strengthening role.

| Evaluation Question	Evaluation Criteria	Link to ToC assumptions
		14. WFP support services adapted to a capacity strengthening role
5.2 What contextual factors were critical to the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Moldova approach to transition and exit?	Sustainability	13. Organisational flexibility exists to move from direct transfers to a capacity strengthening role. 14. WFP support services adapted to a capacity strengthening role

Contribution analysis

2.   The evaluation faced limited monitoring data on outputs and outcomes related to strengthening government systems and capacity, so the team used contribution analysis to understand how WFP activities influenced results within a complex environment involving national institutions, United Nations agencies, and donors. This approach helped test the theory of change, explore alternative explanations, and examine causal linkages using both primary and secondary data. Contribution analysis was applied in particular to the following Evaluation Questions:

- Evaluation Question 3.3 on how far WFP social protection support improved efficiencies in assistance delivery and the functions of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
- Evaluation Question 4.1 on the extent to which multipurpose cash assistance and hot meals enabled beneficiaries to meet essential needs
- Evaluation Question 4.2 on how far WFP strengthened inclusive and shock responsive social protection and food security systems, including equality of access and system responsiveness
- Evaluation Question 4.3 on how capacity strengthening and cash assistance activities addressed gender inequality and the needs of children, vulnerable Moldovans, and refugees
- Evaluation Question 4.5 on the extent to which WFP interventions built the capacity of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection to support vulnerable populations over the medium to longer term

3.   The figure below summarises the main steps to contribution analysis that have been taken.

Figure 35 Approach to contribution analysis
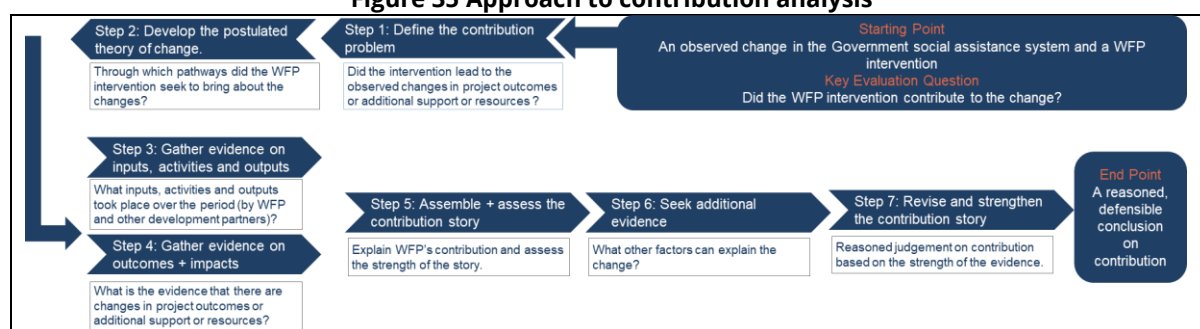
Source: Mokoro based on Mayne (2001). Addressing attribution through contribution analysis: Using performance measures sensibly. Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 16(1), pp.1–24.

Outcome harvesting

4.   The ET used the outcome harvesting methodology specifically to understand WFP's contribution from the perspective of direct beneficiaries of capacity strengthening (i.e. Government staff).

5.   Outcome harvesting (i.e., a methodology that focuses primarily upon the identification of outcomes and then investigates the plausibility of their linkages to programme interventions, rather than focusing upon interventions and measuring outcomes against predetermined indicators) was selected as the main way in which outcomes will be identified and assessed. The outcome harvesting methodology is designed to capture the full range of outcomes due to an intervention through the use of open-ended questions to stakeholders who may be potentially affected by that intervention. It is a qualitative method that relies upon the subjective perceptions of respondents, which are a valued source of evidence reflecting how change is understood and experienced by those closest to it. Where relevant, the process may also identify objective indicators that align with these perceptions, so that data collection and validation can be conducted if necessary.

6.   The open-ended nature of the outcome harvesting methodology limits the extent to which questions could be predefined. The outcome harvesting approach enabled the team to describe and validate the outcomes, and then work backwards to understand how WFP might have contributed to that change. This has allowed the evaluation to provide a detailed description of WFP's contribution to an observed change, in a context where there are different agencies working on capacity strengthening

interventions and where WFP does not have outcome-level reporting data on capacity strengthening. The approach allowed the team to identify the elements/activities in WFP programming that have contributed to change.

7.　　　The ET identified the following areas under the ToC as the focus for the outcome harvesting approach during the data collection process:

- Barriers to accessing social assistance
- Efficiency and quality of social assistance
- The effectiveness of support to strengthening social canteens
- Delivery platforms for emergency cash transfer programmes

8.　　　The checklist of questions for social assistants found in Annex 5 provides details of open-ended questions that are aligned with the outcome harvesting approach.

Sampling

9.　　　**A detailed sampling framework** was developed at inception phase. The ET adopted a purposive approach to sampling. At the national level, our KII targeting approach was informed by our stakeholder mapping and was inclusive of WFP staff, United Nations partners, all government ministries involved in shock responsive social protection, emergency preparedness and refugee contingency planning activities, and local non-governmental organisation (NGO) partners. Particular attention was paid to including partners that are experts on gender, equity, and including, within both the United Nations and civil society organisations.

10.　　　At the sub-national level, we selected one municipality and three districts[188] for field visits. The selection criteria for these municipalities/raions ensured inclusion of both northern and southern raions; inclusion of municipality/raions with a RAC; inclusion of raions with the highest number of beneficiaries to allow a sufficient sample for interviews; and a United Nations focus area,

Table 10.　　　Selected municipalities and districts for field visits

Selected District	Region	RHH HHs	CVM HHs	RAC in district	RRP Focus Area
Bălţi Municipality	North	227	1,185	Yes	Yes
Ocniţa	North	589	538	No	No
Ungheni	Central	55	1,456	No	Yes
Ştefan Vodă	South	191	1,190	Yes	No

Source: Data from WFP CO

Ethics

11.　　　The table below presents a summary of the ethical issues, related risks and safeguards identified by the team during the inception phase. These issues have been monitored and managed during the implementation of the evaluation.

12.　　　All interviewees and focus group participants were notified at the start of each meeting that their participation is voluntary and wholly confidential. They were invited to raise any concerns that they have about participation, and to withdraw if they so choose. No ethical approval was required by Government or United Nations bodies to conduct interviews with affected population.

Table 11.　　　Ethical standards identified at inception

Ethical issues	Safeguards
Confidentiality	The ET will carefully respect the confidentiality of all data and information received and will take thorough precautions to prevent the access of any unauthorised persons to them. Informed consent to be interviewed will be sought from all informants and confidentiality will

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[188] Districts are known as raions in Moldova.

	be guaranteed before any interview or FGD takes place. No individual will be revealed as the source of any information or opinion and no names will be listed in the reports.
Data protection	The ET stores all data securely. FGD and KII transcripts will be stored within a library on MS SharePoint, which is only accessible to the ET. Any audio recordings and handwritten notes will be transcribed, and the recordings/handwritten notes will be destroyed as soon as the transcripts have been created (all transcripts will be uploaded to MS SharePoint within 1 week of data collection concluding). The ET confirms that at the end of the assignment it will delete all confidential data from MS SharePoint. Primary data is not stored on team members' local/temporary storage or transferred via email systems.
Gender	The ET have been selected partly on the basis of their known sensitivity and proactive attitude to gender issues and concerns. The ET is also gender balanced and gender-sensitive methodologies have been mainstreamed throughout the evaluation design. Their performance in this regard is governed by the Mokoro Code of Conduct.
Power imbalances	Informants will be invited to speak in their native language if they prefer. The ET will remain alert to any potential power imbalance and will adopt measures to correct it if they are detected (e.g. during focus groups discussions). Mokoro's internal Quality Support and oversight will be alerted if there are issues of concern.
Protection	The ET will seek to minimise risks to, and burdens on those participating in the evaluation; for example, by ensuring that FGDs are conducted in accessible locations during daylight hours.
Feedback	The ET will ensure that all informants are informed about the evaluation process and timeline during interviews and KIIs (including debriefing presentations, reporting and dissemination). The Evaluation Manager has developed a specific communication plan.

Source: evaluation team

Figure 36 Breakdown of beneficiaries interviewed by sex
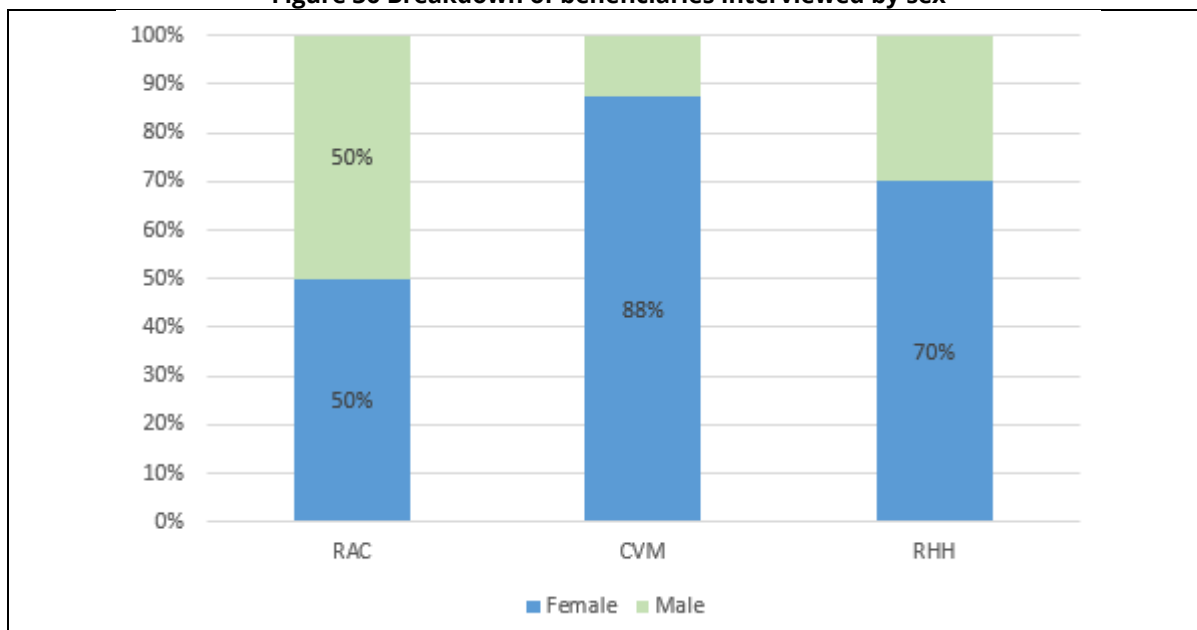
Annex 4.   Evaluation matrix

Evaluation Question EQ1 – To what extent are WFP interventions relevant to meeting the needs of the vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and of MLSP (RELEVANCE)?					
1.1 Was the design of the intervention relevant and did it remain relevant to the wider Moldovan context, the underlying structural issues underpinning vulnerability and the impact of the influx of refugees?					
Sub-questions	Indicators/measures	Data collection methods	Sources of data/information	Data analysis methods/triangulation	Availability/Validity
What were the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis (including the refugee influx) on vulnerable Moldovans and social cohesion? What were the consequences of changes in the international humanitarian context on the design? To what extent did the design take into account GEWE? How were WFP plans adapted to dynamically reflect changes in the operating context over time?	T-ICSP/ICSP design supported by an appropriate contextual analysis Perceptions of the relevance of the T-ICSP/ICSP/ ICSP design Inclusion of social cohesion as a programme objective Changes in WFP strategic positioning over time reflecting context changes during implementation	Document review Semi-structured interviews	Research and analysis on the food security context T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports WFP draft Strategy Plan WFP & partner interviews	Content analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders
1.2 To what extent did the intervention plan to address the specific needs and priorities refugees?					
Sub-questions	Indicators/measures	Data collection methods	Sources of data/information	Data analysis methods	Availability

To what extent was the design based on the assessed needs of refugees, including female refugees and other vulnerable groups? What role did other factors (including Government and donor preferences, other agency plans) play in influencing the refugee response plan?	Refugee needs assessments conducted by WFP or other agencies Degree of alignment of T-ICSP/ICSP with assessed needs of refugees Level of planned response to residual needs after support provided by other actors/ agencies	Document review Semi-structured interviews Beneficiary Interviews	T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports WFP & partner interviews Refugee consultations	Content analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders and beneficiaries

Sub-questions	Indicators/measures	Data collection methods	Sources of data/information	Data analysis methods	Availability
To what extent did the T-ICSP/ICSP design reflect the assessed needs of Moldovans, including women and other vulnerable groups? What role did other factors (including Government and donor preferences, other agency plans) play in response planning?	Needs assessments conducted by WFP or other agencies Extent of alignment of T-ICSP/ICSP with the needs of vulnerable Moldovans and hosting families Level of planned response to residual needs after support provided by other actors/ agencies	Document review Semi-structured interviews Beneficiary Interviews	T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports WFP & partner interviews Resident population consultations	Content analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders and beneficiaries

Sub-questions	Indicators/measures	Data collection methods	Sources of data/information	Data analysis methods	Availability
On what basis were capacity strengthening priorities decided? Did MLSP agree on the prioritisation of capacity strengthening activities? How and why did the capacity strengthening plans evolve over time?	Alignment between the T-ICSP/ICSP and capacity assessments Involvement of the Government in the design of T-ICSP/ICSP capacity strengthening activities Evidence of adaptation of capacity strengthening activities based on monitoring and lesson learning	Document review Semi-structured interviews	Capacity Assessments T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports WFP & Government interviews	Content Analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders

Evaluation Question EQ2 – How coherent have WFP interventions been with broader social protection policies and programmes in Moldova and how has WFP ensured synergies between its cash-based transfers (CBT) and social protection capacity strengthening support (COHERENCE)?					
2.1 How well has WFP's social protection intervention aligned with the national social protection policies and reforms of the Government of Moldova implemented by the MLSP and other partners?					
Sub-questions	**Indicators/measures**	**Data collection methods**	**Sources of data/information**	**Data analysis methods**	**Availability**

Sub-questions	Indicators/measures	Data collection methods	Sources of data/information	Data analysis methods	Availability
How well aligned were the WFP plans with relevant national development policies, and plans? How well aligned were the WFP plans with relevant national development policies, and plans relating to gender equality and empowerment? How well aligned were WFP plans with the RESTART and other Government reforms?	Explicit cross-references between T-ICSP/ICSP and the sectoral and thematic policies and plans Government and other stakeholder perceptions of degree of alignment	Document review Semi-structured interviews	T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports National social protection and disaster management policies, plans and strategies RESTART documents Capacity strengthening plans of other agencies WFP, Government and partner interviews	Content Analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders

2.2 How complementary have WFP-designed CBT and social protection actions been to each other over the course of WFP presence in Moldova from the opening of the Country Office until preparations for responsible exit??

Sub-questions	Indicators/measures	Data collection methods	Sources of data/information	Data analysis methods	Availability
What were the strengths and limitations of the CSP process in supporting a strategic transition from humanitarian response to technical assistance? To what extent did humanitarian response activities open the door for technical assistance? To what extent were SO1 activities used to pilot or learn lessons relevant to strengthening national social protection system?	Extent of cross-reference in T-ICSP/ICSP design between the different SOs and Activities Perceptions of the synergies between CBTs and capacity strengthening	Document review Semi-structured interviews	T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports WFP, Government & partner interviews	Content analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders

To what extent do the capacity strengthening activities credibly enable the increasing use of the national social protection system as a platform for delivering international assistance?					

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6" style="background-color:#1ba05c;color:white">2.3 What have been the synergies between WFP interventions, UNSDCF and the government - UN refugee response managed under the Refugee Coordination Model?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sub-questions</td><td>Indicators/measures</td><td>Data collection methods</td><td>Sources of data/information</td><td>Data analysis methods</td><td>Availability</td></tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the extent and benefits of alignment between the T-ICSP/ICSP and UNSCDF?

What were the extent and benefits of alignment between the T-ICSP/ICSP and RRP?

How well did WFP coordinate its activities with the actions of other UN partners?</td>
<td>Level of participation of WFP in the design and implementation of the UNDSCF and RRP

Involvement of other agencies in the T-ICSP/ICSP planning

Alignment between T-ICSP/ICSP, UNDSCF and RRP objectives and activities

Evidence of effective coordinated planning with UN agencies

Evidence of synergies resulting from coordinated planning with UN partner agencies</td>
<td>Document review

Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions

Annual Country Reports

UNSCDF 2023-2027

UNHCR Refugee Response Plans

WFP, UN & Government interviews</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>Good availability of documents

Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr><td colspan="6" style="background-color:#1f6bb0;color:white">Evaluation Question EQ3 – To what extent have WFP 's capacity strengthening, food and cash assistance interventions been efficient to meet the needs of vulnerable</td></tr>
</table>

Moldovans, refugees and national social protection system (EFFICIENCY)?					
3.1 To what extent have WFP CBT processes been timely, secure, and accessible?					
Sub-questions	**Indicators/measures**	**Data collection methods**	**Sources of data/information**	**Data analysis methods**	**Availability**
How timely were the delivery of CBT transfers? How effective were safeguards against the misappropriation of CBTs? Were the CBT transfers made in accordance with protection norms and standards, including in relation to women and other vulnerable groups?	Calculation of proportions of operations carried out on schedule or late (and by how long) Alignment of time of delivery to beneficiary needs Factors contributing to timeliness Percentage loss and diversions of CBTs Actions taken to minimise loss and diversion of assistance Knowledge and application of protection principles by partners (including Government) AAP mechanisms established and functional and arrangements for institutionalisation Level of awareness amongst beneficiaries of protection rights	Document review Data analysis Semi-structured interviews Beneficiary Interviews and direct observation	T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports Annual Performance Plans CFM Data WFP AAP Policies WFP, Government & partner interviews Beneficiary (refugee and vulnerable Moldovans) interviews	Content analysis Quantitative Analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders Some limitations to availability of detailed quantitative data anticipated
3.2 To what extent did the use of government systems contribute to WFP's ability to deliver assistance to vulnerable Moldovans and refugees, and what were the success factors / challenges?					

Sub-questions	Indicators/measures	Data collection methods	Sources of data/information	Data analysis methods	Availability
How did the effectiveness and efficiency of Government platforms for CBTs compare to direct deliveries by WFP? What factors supported and inhibited the use of Government systems	Volume of CBT transfers made through Government systems over time Data on comparative efficiency of using national systems Perceptions of benefits and limitations of using Government systems Perceptions of factors promoting and constraining the use of national systems	Document review Data analysis Semi-structured interviews Beneficiary Interviews	T-ICSP, ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports WFP data on regional/global costs of CBTs using different channels WFP, Government & partner interviews Beneficiary interviews	Content Analysis Quantitative Analysis (descriptive ??)	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders

3.3 How far has WFP social protection support led to efficiencies in the delivery of assistance to vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and to the functions of MLSP social assistance processes?					
Sub-questions	Indicators/measures	Data collection methods	Sources of data/information	Data analysis methods	Availability
What was the contribution of WFP to improving the efficiency of MLSP business processes? How did this complement the activities of other agencies?	Delivery of relevant capacity strengthening activities, including digitization Observed changes in operational efficiency of Government systems over time Contribution of WFP activities and other stakeholders to observed changes Perception of government	Document review Data collection Semi-structured interviews	WFP Technical Reports Annual Country Reports Annual Performance Plans Government budget data WFP, Government & partner interviews	Content Analysis Quantitative Analysis Contribution Analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders Limiting factor may be availability of detailed quantitative data from Government

	stakeholders about WFPs support for enhancing efficiency of MLSP business process.				

3.4 To what extent and in what ways have WFP's institutional arrangements (HR processes, planning, financing, monitoring and reporting; etc.) facilitated or constrained the ability of WFP Moldova to deliver on its commitments to support strengthened social protection?					
Sub-questions	**Indicators/measures**	**Data collection methods**	**Sources of data/information**	**Data analysis methods**	**Availability**
Did WFP systems facilitate appropriate human resources to implement the T-ICSP/ICSP and adapt appropriately over time?

Were WFP planning tools and systems well adapted to the objectives of capacity strengthening?

Was the T-ICSP/ICSP resourcing adequate and sufficiently flexible | Adequacy of WFP CO staffing at different levels for T-ICSP/ICSP implementation

Evidence of proactive planning to adjust the HR complement to meet evolving needs over time

User satisfaction with planning frameworks in Moldovan context

Frequency and reasons for Budget Revisions

Comparison of Needs-Based Plan, Implementation Plan, available resources and expenditure per year

Degree to which any form or level of earmarking and conditionality affected implementation

Resource mobilisation strategy in place

Consequences of funding | Document review

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews | T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions

Annual Country Reports

Annual Performance Plans

Other WFP monitoring data

WFP technical reviews and lesson learning exercises

WFP HR data and reports (including Strategic Workforce Planning)

WFP budget and other CPB data

WFP donor relations data and records

WFP staff and donor interviews | Quantitative Analysis

Content Analysis | Good availability of documents and data

Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders |

	shortfalls on T-ICSP/ICSP implementation				
	Satisfaction with CRF (and CO specific) indicators in tracking various outputs and outcomes				
Was monitoring and evaluation effective in tracking progress across the T-ICSP/ICSP SOs and activities and supporting adaptive management?	Evidence of T-ICSP management decisions referencing internal monitoring and evaluation				

Evaluation Question EQ4 – To what extent have WFP interventions contributed to, or are they expected to contribute to, strengthening the institutional capacities of the MLSP and addressing the essential needs of vulnerable population in Moldova (EFFECTIVENESS)?

4.1 To what extent have the multipurpose cash assistance to Moldovans and hot meals targeting refugees enabled beneficiaries to meet their essential needs?

Sub-questions	Indicators/measures	Data collection methods	Sources of data/information	Data analysis methods	Availability
To what extent did WFP contribute to meeting the needs of beneficiaries? Were there other welfare benefits?	WFP performance in delivering CBTs against targets Changes in food security and other welfare outcomes of target group Other contextual factors influencing changes in food security of beneficiaries	Document review Data analysis Semi-structured interviews Beneficiary Interviews and direct observation	T-ICSP/ICSP, ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports Annual Performance Plans Other WFP Monitoring Data WFP, Government & partner interviews Beneficiary interviews	Quantitative Analysis Contribution Analysis Content Analysis	Good availability of documents and data Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders

4.2 To what extent is WFP support achieving its intended objective of enhancing inclusive and shock-responsive social protection and food security systems and capacities of Government of Moldova?

Sub-questions	Indicators/measures	Data collection methods	Sources of data/information	Data analysis methods	Availability
To what extent did WFP contribute to improving equality and access to national social protection benefits? To what extent did WFP contribute to improving the shock responsiveness of national systems?	Extent to which planned capacity strengthening activities conducted Evidence of increased coverage of national systems Evidence of continuing barriers to accessing social assistance Evidence that social cohesion is improved/ maintained Adoption of new SOPs for SRSP	Document review Data analysis Semi-structured interviews Beneficiary Interviews	T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports Annual Performance Plans Other WFP Monitoring Data WFP, Government & partner interviews Beneficiary interviews	Quantitative Analysis Contribution Analysis Content Analysis	Good availability of documents and data Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders
4.3 How did the social protection capacity strengthening and cash assistance activities address gender inequality and the special needs of children, vulnerable Moldovans and refugees?					
Sub-questions	**Indicators/measures**	**Data collection methods**	**Sources of data/information**	**Data analysis methods**	**Availability**
To what extent has the capacity of national systems to address the needs of women and other vulnerable groups changed? To what extent did WFP contribute to these changes?	Extent to which the T-ICSP defines and articulates a focus on supporting the MLSP to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised Efforts conducted to identify intersectional vulnerabilities and structural barriers to inclusion in social protection Changes in MLSP	Document review Semi-structured interviews Beneficiary Interviews	T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports Annual Performance Plans Other WFP Monitoring Data United Nations and other agency monitoring data and technical reports WFP, Government & partner interviews	Content Analysis Quantitative Analysis Contribution Analysis	Good availability of documents and data Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders

	programmes and processes with regard to the inclusion of women and other vulnerable groups		Beneficiary interviews		

4.4 What factors influenced WFP's ability to achieve or not achieve the intended objective of enhancing inclusive and shock-responsive social protection and food security systems and capacities of Government of Moldova?					
Sub-questions	**Indicators/measures**	**Data collection methods**	**Sources of data/information**	**Data analysis methods**	**Availability**
To what extent have partnerships contributed to the achievement of capacity strengthening results? To what extent did WFP advocacy influence political commitment to social protection? What other contextual factors contributed to enhancing inclusive and shock-responsive social protection system?	Partnerships entered into during T-ICSP/ICSP. References to roles of partnerships in WFP performance reports and assessments Examples of other factors contributing to capacity strengthening results Examples of other factors impeding capacity strengthening results	Document review Semi-structured interviews	T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports United Nations and other agency reports Records of agreements WFP, Government & other partner interviews	Content analysis Quantitative Analysis	

4.5 How far have WFP interventions built the capacity of the MLSP social assistance systems to deliver support to vulnerable populations over the medium to longer term?					
Sub-questions	**Indicators/measures**	**Data collection methods**	**Sources of data/information**	**Data analysis methods**	**Availability**
To what extent has the Government committed to sustain and institutionalise the capacities strengthened	National policy commitments to continuing and expanding support to SRSP	Document review Semi-structured interviews	Budget data from GRM, World Bank WFP, Government and	Content Analysis Quantitative Analysis Contribution Analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability

| through the T-ICSP/ICSP? What factors are expected to influence the sustainability of these innovations over the medium to longer term? | Changes in the share of the national budget dedicated to social protection

Perceptions of the probability of sustaining institutional innovations related to SRSP | | other stakeholders (eg. IFI, donors) interviews | | of information from stakeholders

Limiting factor may be availability of detailed quantitative data from Government |

Evaluation Question EQ5 – How have WFP activities been designed and conducted to facilitate a responsible exit by WFP (SUSTAINABILITY)?

5.1   How has the approach to a responsible exit evolved over time, and in the nature of WFPs partnerships and the use of WFP's corporate toolbox?

Sub-questions	**Indicators/measures**	**Data collection methods**	**Sources of data/information**	**Data analysis methods**	**Availability**
How does WFP conceptualise a "responsible exit" and how does this differ from the closure of a country office? To what extent was transition and exit considered in various phases of the T-ICSP/ICSP and how did this evolve over time? To what extent did WFP cash-based transfers align with national systems in terms of targeting coherence, payment channels, interoperability of data systems, grievance redress harmonization, or joint monitoring? To what	Changes in references to transition/handover over different phase of the T-ICSP/ICSP Existence of a roadmap for a responsible transition and exit Coordination and agreements with other agencies to sustain support to shock responsive social protection initiatives Consideration of continued WFP support, including from MENAEERO and HQ Other arrangements in place to support a responsible exit/transition	Document review Semi-structured interviews	T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports United Nations and other agency reports Records of agreements WFP, Government & other partner interviews	Content Analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders

extent did this facilitate a responsible exit?

To what extent did WFP leverage its partnership with the government, local and international actors and donors to plan for a responsible exit from Moldova?

What is the anticipated effectiveness of these arrangements?

5.2 What contextual factors were critical to the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Moldova approach to transition and exit?					
Sub-questions	**Indicators/measures**	**Data collection methods**	**Sources of data/information**	**Data analysis methods**	**Availability**
What were the key contextual factors driving the choices made on transition and exit How replicable are elements of the approach to transition and exit adopted in Moldova?	Perceptions of key contextual factors Perceptions of replicability	Document review Semi-structured interviews	T-ICSP/ICSP and Budget Revisions Annual Country Reports WFP, Government & other partner interviews	Content Analysis	Good availability of documents Anticipated good availability of information from stakeholders

Annex 5. Data collection tools

Annex 5.1: KII interviews

Key Informant Interviews

1.　　The following interview guides have been developed to collect qualitative information from the key stakeholders identified during the inception phase in a targeted manner. These guides take the form of 'semi-structured' checklists. Each proposed question in the guide covers a different question/sub-question of the evaluation matrix. The guides provide some structure to a conversation, but are not intended to be read word for word and, given time constraints, only a sub-set of questions will be addressed by each informant, with interviewers needing to focus on issues where each interviewee can add most value. The guide also does not provide a comprehensive overview of all questions to be asked. The interviewer will follow up with further questions and clarifications, depending on the responses given. The interviewer will also be free to rephrase questions in order to make them appropriate for different audiences and will omit questions if they are not relevant to the stakeholder being interviewed. However, effort has already been made to identify the questions that will be relevant for different stakeholder groups.

2.　　All interviews will be confidential, and the ET will take careful measures to ensure that notes on interviews are not seen outside the team. A template will be followed for recording interviews, and is included below. This provides an opportunity for team members to provide initial analytical comments on the interview, in summary, and also to provide a reminder to the team for issues to probe further and additional stakeholders and documentation/data to follow up on as part of the data collection. All interview notes will be compiled into a searchable compendium to feed into the analysis process.

3.　　During the semi-structured interviews, the ET will follow the general protocol below:

- **Introduction** (common for all interviews/focus groups). "We are part of an independent consulting company, Mokoro, and have been contracted by WFP to carry out an independent evaluation of WFP's cash-based transfers and social protection activities in transitioning emergency assistance to national systems and preparing for a responsible exit in Moldova. The objective of this evaluation is for us to formulate recommendations on future activities in Moldova and draw corporate lessons on working with national social protection system and processes of responsible exit. We are therefore very interested in hearing your feedback on WFP's performance to date, and whether you have any recommendations for WFP."

- **Presentation of each participant and evaluation team member**. "My name is XXX and my role in the evaluation is xxx".

- **Presentation of the methodology, including confidentiality. "**All interviews are confidential. The information will be used only in an aggregate form in our report and cannot be attributed to the people interviewed. No interviewee will be identified, except as part of a relationship or list of people interviewed, which will be included at the end of the evaluation document. If you do not wish to be part of this list, you can let us know either now or at a later stage. Participation is completely voluntary. You have every right to decide to participate or not. You can also withdraw form this interview at any point."

- **Any questions**. "In case of questions or complaints about this evaluation, you can contact Jason Nyirenda in the WFP CO.

- **Presentation of the interview format**. "I have some questions to guide our conversation. If there is something that you feel is beyond your experience or knowledge, please let me know. To help the evaluation team remember our conversation today, I will be taking some handwritten notes. I would also ask your permission to make an audio recording purely to support note taking."

- **Introduction of evaluation participants.** "Please introduce yourself and provide an overview of your role, your/your organisation's interactions with WFP, and how long you've been in your current position".

Table 12.   **KII questions per EQs and category of Key Informants**

		WFP	Govt	UN	Donors	NGOs	Refugees	Residents	Others
	Evaluation Question EQ1 – To what extent are WFP interventions relevant to meeting the needs of the vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and of MLSP?								
	1.1 Was the design of the intervention relevant and did it remain relevant to the wider Moldovan context, the underlying structural issues underpinning vulnerability and the impact of the influx of refugees?								
	Prompts:								
1.1	*What were the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis (including the refugee influx) on vulnerable Moldovans and social cohesion?*	X	X	X		X	X	X	
1.1	*What were the consequences of changes in the international humanitarian context on the design?*	X		X					
1.1	*To what extent did the design take into account GEWE?*	X		X	X	X			
1.1	*How were WFP plans adapted to dynamically reflect changes in the operating context over time?*	X							
	1.2 To what extent did the intervention plan to address the specific needs and priorities refugees?								
	Prompts:								
1.2	*To what extent was the design based on the assessed needs of refugees, including female refugees and other vulnerable groups?*	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
1.2	*What role did other factors (including Government and donor preferences, other agency plans) play in influencing the refugee response plan?*	X	X	X	X	X			
	1.3 To what extent did the intervention plan to address the specific needs and priorities of vulnerable Moldovans?								
	Prompts:								
1.3	*To what extent did the T-ICSP design reflect the assessed food security needs of Moldovans, including women and other vulnerable groups??*	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
1.3	*What role did other factors (including Government and donor preferences, other agency plans) play in response planning?*	X	X	X	X	X			
	1.4 How well was the intervention designed to address the relevant needs and priorities of the MLSP supported by WFP?								

		WFP	Govt	UN	Donors	NGOs	Refugees	Residents	Others
	Prompts:								
1.4	*On what basis were capacity strengthening priorities decided?*	X	X	X	X				X
1.4	*Did MLSP agree on the prioritisation of capacity strengthening activities?*	X	X						X
1.4	*How and why did the capacity strengthening plans evolve over time?*	X	X	X	X				X
	Evaluation Question EQ2 – How coherent have WFP interventions been with broader social protection policies and programmes in Moldova and how has WFP ensured synergies between its cash-based transfers (CBT) and social protection capacity strengthening support?								
	2.1 How well has WFP's social protection intervention aligned with the national social protection policies and reforms of the Government of Moldova implemented by the MLSP and other partners?								
	Prompts:								
2.1	*How well aligned were the WFP plans with relevant national development policies, and plans?*	X	X						
2.1	*How well aligned were the WFP plans with relevant national development policies, and plans relating to gender equality and empowerment?*	X	X	X	X				
2.1	*How well aligned were WFP plans with the RESTART and other Government reforms?*	X	X	X	X				
	2.2 How complementary have WFP-designed CBT and social protection actions been to each other over the course of WFP presence in Moldova from the opening of the Country Office until preparations for responsible exit?								
	Prompts:								
2.2	*What were the strengths and limitations of the CSP process in supporting a strategic transition from humanitarian response to technical assistance?*	X	X		X				
2.2	*To what extent did humanitarian response activities open the door for technical assistance?*	X	X	X	X				
2.2	*To what extent were SO1 activities used to pilot or learn lessons relevant to strengthening national social protection system?*	X	X						
2.2	*To what extent do the capacity strengthening activities credibly enable the increasing use of the national social protection system as a platform for delivering international assistance?*	X	X	X	X				

		WFP	Govt	UN	Donors	NGOs	Refugees	Residents	Others
	2.3 What have been the synergies between WFP interventions, UNSDCF and the government - UN refugee response managed under the Refugee Coordination Model?								
	Prompts:								
2.3	*What were the extent and benefits of alignment between the T-ICSP/ICSP and UNSCDF?*	X	X	X					
2.3	*What were the extent and benefits of alignment between the T-ICSP/ICSP and RRP?*	X		X		X			
2.3	*How well did WFP coordinate its activities with the actions of other UN partners?*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
	Evaluation Question EQ3 – To what extent have WFP 's capacity strengthening, food and cash assistance interventions been efficient to meet the needs of vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and national social protection system?								
	3.1 To what extent have WFP CBT processes been timely, secure, and accessible?								
	Prompts:								
3.1	How timely were the delivery of CBT transfers?	X	X			X	X	X	
3.1	How effective were safeguards against the misappropriation of CBTs?	X	X			X	X	X	
3.1	Were the CBT transfers made in accordance with protection norms and standards, including in relation to women and other vulnerable groups??	X	X			X	X	X	X
	3.2 To what extent did WFP align with government systems to deliver assistance to vulnerable Moldovans and refugees and what were the benefits and challenges?								
	Prompts:								
3.2	*To what extent did WFP align with/ use Government cash transfer systems?*	X	X			X	X	X	
3.2	*What factors supported and inhibited the alignment/ use of Government systems?*								
3.2	*What were the benefits of using/ aligning with national systems?*	X	X						
	3.3 How far has WFP social protection support led to efficiencies in the delivery of assistance to vulnerable Moldovans, refugees and to the functions of MLSP social assistance processes?								
	Prompts:								

		WFP	Govt	UN	Donors	NGOs	Refugees	Residents	Others
3.3	*What was the contribution of WFP to improving the efficiency of MLSP business processes?*	X	X	X		X	X	X	
3.3	*How did this complement the activities of other agencies?*	X	X	X		X			
	3.4 To what extent and in what ways have WFP's institutional arrangements (HR processes, planning, financing, monitoring and reporting; etc.) facilitated or constrained the ability of WFP Moldova to deliver on its commitments to support strengthened social protection?								
	Prompts:								
3.4	*Did WFP systems facilitate appropriate human resources to implement the T-ICSP/ICSP and adapt appropriately over time?*	X	X	X	X				
3.4	*Were WFP planning tools and systems well adapted to the objectives of capacity strengthening?*	X							
3.4	*Was the T-ICSP/ICSP resourcing adequate and sufficiently flexible?*	X			X				
3.4	*Was monitoring and evaluation effective in tracking progress across the T-ICSP/ICSP SOs and activities and supporting adaptive management?*								
	Evaluation Question EQ4 – To what extent have WFP interventions contributed to, or are they expected to contribute to, strengthening the institutional capacities of the MLSP and addressing the essential needs of vulnerable population in Moldova?								
	4.1 To what extent have the multipurpose cash assistance to Moldovans and hot meals targeting refugees enabled beneficiaries to meet their essential needs?								
	Prompts:								
4.1	*To what extent did WFP contribute to improving the food security of beneficiaries?*	X	X			X	X	X	
4.2	*Were there other welfare benefits?*	X	X			X	X	X	
	4.2 To what extent is WFP support achieving its intended objective of enhancing inclusive and shock-responsive social protection and food security systems and capacities of Government of Moldova?								
	Prompts:								
4.2	To what extent did WFP contribute to improving access to national social protection benefits?	X	X	X		X	X	X	
4.2	To what extent did WFP contribute to improving the shock responsiveness of national systems?	X	X	X	X				

		WFP	Govt	UN	Donors	NGOs	Refugees	Residents	Others
	4.3 How did the social protection capacity strengthening and cash assistance activities address gender inequality and the special needs of children, vulnerable Moldovans and refugees?								
	Prompts:								
4.3	*To what extent has the capacity of national systems to address the needs of women and other vulnerable groups changed?*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
4.3	*To what extent did WFP contribute to these changes?*	X	X	X		X			
	4.4 What factors influenced WFP's ability to achieve or not achieve the intended objective of enhancing inclusive and shock-responsive social protection and food security systems and capacities of Government of Moldova?								
	Prompts:								
4.4	*To what extent have partnerships contributed to the achievement of capacity strengthening results?*	X	X	X	X	X			
4.4	*To what extent did WFP advocacy influence political commitment to social protection?*	X	X		X				
4.4	*What other contextual factors contributed to enhancing inclusive and shock-responsive social protection system?*	X	X	X	X	X			
	4.5 How far have WFP interventions built the capacity of the MLSP social assistance systems to deliver support to vulnerable populations over the medium to longer term?								
	Prompts:								
4.5	*To what extent has the Government committed to sustain and institutionalise the capacities strengthened through the T-ICSP/ICSP*	X	X	X	X				
4.5	*What factors are expected to influence the sustainability of these innovations over the medium to longer term?*	X	X	X	X				
	Evaluation Question EQ5 – How have WFP activities been designed and conducted to facilitate a responsible exit by WFP?								
	5.1 How has the approach to a responsible exit evolved over time, and in the nature of WFPs partnerships and the use of WFP's corporate toolbox?								
	Prompts:								
5.1	*How does WFP conceptualise a "responsible exit" and how does this differ from the closure of a country office?*		X	X	X				

		WFP	Govt	UN	Donors	NGOs	Refugees	Residents	Others
5.1	*To what extent was transition and exit considered in various phases of the T-ICSP/ICSP and how did this evolve over time?*	X	X	X	X	X			
5.1	*To what extent did WFP leverage its partnership with the government, local and international actors and donors to plan for a responsible exit from Moldova?*	X	X	X	X	X			
5.1	*What is the anticipated effectiveness of these arrangements?*	X	X	X	X	X			
	5.2 What contextual factors were critical to the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Moldova approach to transition and exit?								
	Prompts:								
5.2	*What were the key contextual factors driving the choices made on transition and exit*	X			X				
5.2	*How replicable are elements of the approach to transition and exit adopted in Moldova?*	X			X				

Annex 5.2: Checklists of questions for Social Assistants

Note: questions are prompts and are open-ended to allow outcomes to emerge naturally. Facilitator should encourage the use of examples and specific instances of change.

Step 1: Identification of outcomes.

- Can you describe any significant changes in how you carry out your responsibilities as a social assistant since 2022? *Additional prompts:*
- Have there been changes in how you identify or support vulnerable people in your community (e.g., refugees, vulnerable Moldovan households)?
    a) Have there been changes in how you provide support to social canteens?
    b) Have you used new tools, standard operating procedures, or systems in your work recently? If yes, what are they and how did you start using them?
    c) Have you adapted any existing tools, standard operating procedures, or systems in your work recently? If yes, in what way did you make changes?
    d) Have your relationships or collaboration with other institutions (e.g., local NGOs, national authorities, international agencies) changed recently? In what way?
- Additional GEWE/Equity/Inclusion prompts
    a) Have you made any changes in how you engage with women or other vulnerable groups when identifying those in need?
    b) Have you supported any individuals or groups who were previously excluded (e.g., persons with disabilities, Roma communities, elderly living alone)? How did you do that?

Step 2: Elaboration of outcomes.

- For each of the outcomes identified under Step 1:
- Describe any support received from WFP since 2022 (e.g. training, tools, guidance, coordination support, system-strengthening) that supported the change to take place? How did the support from WFP contribute to how you have provided social assistance? *Provide additional prompts to understand efficiency (time taken for social assistance processes/support to be provided) and quality of support provided.*
    a) Were there any other organisations, institutions, or projects (besides WFP) that also supported your work? Who were they, and what did they do?
    b) In what way did WFP support differ from that of other partners?
    c) Did WFP provide you with tools or training that helped you consider gender or social inclusion in your work? If yes, what were they and how did you apply them?; How did these tools or guidance help you respond to the needs of different groups (e.g., single mothers, refugees, elderly women)?

Step 3: Significance and sustainability of outcomes

- Why do you think these changes in your work or capacities are important? Who has benefited from these changes?
- Have these changes helped you respond better to crises (e.g., refugee influx, economic shocks)? How?
- Do you feel more confident or better equipped to do your work compared to before? Why?
- Are the new practices or tools you've adopted now part of the routine/system at your level?

- Do you think these changes have improved equity in who receives support? How so?
- What support do you still need to continue using these practices in the long term?
- Do you see any challenges in the future if WFP or other partners reduce their support?

Step 4: Additional feedback

- Is there anything you think WFP or others could have done differently to better support your role?

Annex 5.3: Checklists of questions for refugees / vulnerable Moldovans

- What types of help or support (social assistance) have you or your household received since 2022? *(Prompts: cash, vouchers, amount received, timeliness etc.)*
- Who provided this support? (*Prompts: government, municipality, WFP, UNHCR, NGOs, local community groups?*)
- Was the support regular or only at certain times? How predictable or reliable was it?
- Did the support you received meet your most important needs? Why or why not? *(Prompts: Was the amount enough? Could you choose what to spend it on? What was missing?)*
- What types of needs are still not being met for you or your household?
- If you received cash or vouchers, what did you mostly use them for?
- How would you compare cash/voucher assistance to other types of support you've received?
- Have you noticed any changes in how social assistance is delivered over the past 2-3 years? *(Prompts: Has it become easier/harder to access? Quicker/slower? More/less fair?)*
- Has the quality of service improved or declined? In what ways? (*Prompts: Staff attitudes, amount received, wait times, communication, targeting*)
- How easy or difficult was it to understand how to apply or register for assistance?
- Have the people who help deliver assistance (like social assistants) become more helpful, more available, or better trained?
- Do you feel that the different organisations and institutions that provide assistance work well together? (*Prompts: Any duplication, gaps, confusion, referrals*?)
- Have you been referred from one organisation to another for help? Was that process smooth?
- Do you feel that the national or local government is more committed to helping vulnerable people now than before? Why or why not?
- Have you seen any signs of the government taking more leadership or responsibility in providing assistance compared to before?
- If you could make one recommendation to improve social assistance in Moldova, what would it be?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share that we haven't asked?

Annex 5.4: Checklists of questions for refugee focal points in RACs.

Introduction
- Can you describe your role as the refugee focal point. What are your main responsibilities?
- To what extent are you aware of WFP support to RACs ? Please explain.

Support provided to RACs.
- What types of social assistance has the RAC received since 2022? *(Prompts: cash, food, amount received, timeliness etc.)*
- Who provided this support? (*Prompts: government, municipality, WFP, UNHCR, NGOs, local community groups?)*
- Was the support regular or only at certain times? How predictable or reliable was it?
- Did the support the RAC received meet the most important needs of the refugees? Why or why not? *(Prompts: Was the amount enough? Could you choose what to spend it on? What was missing?)*
- What types of needs are still not being met for the refugees?
- Have you noticed any changes in how social assistance is delivered over the past 2-3 years to refugees? *(Prompts: Has it become easier/harder to access? Quicker/slower? More/less fair?)*
- Has the quality of service improved or declined? In what ways? (*Prompts: Staff attitudes, amount received, wait times, communication, targeting*)
- Do you feel that the different organisations and institutions that provide assistance work well together? (*Prompts: Any duplication, gaps, confusion, referrals*?)
- Have you been able to report any feedback or complaints related to the support you received for the RAC? If so, how? (follow up on type of feedback/complaints, and whether response from WFP/Government/partner was sufficient)
- Is there anything else you'd like to share that we haven't asked?

Specific training for refugee focal points

- Have you received any training/technical assistance/support to systems recently that has helped you better support refugees since 2022? Please explain what you have received (e.g. training, tools, guidance, coordination support, system-strengthening)
- Has any of this support been received from WFP ? Please elaborate exactly what support they have provided and in what way did WFP support differ from that of other partners?
- Were there any other organisations, institutions, or projects (besides WFP) that also supported your work? Who were they, and what did they do?
- What changes have you realised as a result of this training? How has this training affected how you carry out your responsibilities as a refugee focal point?
  - Prompts:
  - Why do you think these changes in your work or capacities are important?

- o   Who else has benefited from these changes?
- o   Have these changes helped you respond better to crises (e.g., refugee influx, economic shocks)? How?
- o   Do you feel more confident or better equipped to do your work compared to before? Why?
- o   Are the new practices or tools you've adopted now part of the routine/system at your level?
- Additional GEWE/Equity/Inclusion prompts

Final feedback.
- Is there anything you think WFP or others could have done differently to better support your role?

Annex 6. Fieldwork agenda

1.   The field mission schedule below provides an outline of the data collection mission in Moldova (Table 13).

Table 13.   Fieldwork agenda

Day	Date	Time	Activity	Fieldwork
Monday	11-Aug	AM	**9-10 am** WFP Security briefing and context analysis	
			10-11.30am WFP field logistics and interview	
			Internal evaluation team meeting	
		PM	Internal evaluation team meeting	
			15.30 WFP CO stakeholder	
			Internal evaluation team meeting	
Tuesday	12-Aug	AM	**9-10AM:** Head of TA coordination Dep	
			11am-12noon: WFP HR	
		PM	**2-3pm** WFP CO stakeholder	
			15.30-16.30pm WFP CO stakeholder	
			16.00-17.00pm IOM stakeholders	
Wednesday	13-Aug	AM	**9am** WFP CO stakeholder	
			11am: RESTART stakeholder	
		PM	**1pm:** ECHO stakeholder	**approx 3.30pm: travel to Balti**
			13.30 MLSP stakeholder	
			16.00-17.00: UNRC stakeholder	
Thursday	14-Aug	AM	**9-10am:** MLSP stakeholder	**Balti KIIs/FGDs**
			11am-12 noon: UNDP stakeholders	
		PM	**1-2 pm:** UNICEF stakeholder	

Day	Date	AM/PM	Meeting	Field Activity
Friday	15-Aug	AM	9am -10am WFP CO stakeholder	**Ocnita KIIs/FGDs**
			11am-12pm Evisoft stakeholder	
		PM	13.00-14.00pm RESTART stakeholder	
			3pm-4pm UN stakeholder	
			12.00-17.30pm Team meeting/working	
Monday	18-Aug	AM	09.30-10.30 MLSP stakeholder	**Ungheni KIIs/FGDs**
			11-12 pm Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation stakeholder	
			11am-12pm WFP CO Stakeholder	
		PM	14.00-15.00 UNFPA stakeholder	
			16.00-17.00 UNHCR stakeholders	
Tuesday	19-Aug	AM	9-10am WFP CO stakeholder	
			9-10am Social Inspectorate stakeholder	
			11am - 12pm EU delegation stakeholder	
			11am-12 HelpAge stakeholders	
		PM	13.00-14.00 MLSP stakeholder	**approx 3.30pm: travel to Stefan Voda**
			15.30-16.30pm MLSP stakeholder	
Wednesday	20-Aug	AM	GSU - suggested any time	**Stefan Voda KIIs/FGDs**
		PM	11.30 -12.30 UNICEF stakeholder	
			15.30-16.30 WFP CO stakeholder	
			17.00-18.00pm UNFPA stakeholder	

Day	Date	AM/PM	Meeting	Field Activity
Thursday	21-Aug	AM	9.30-10.30 FCDO stakeholder	
				approx 12.30pm: return to Chisinau
		PM	14-15.30pm WFP CD	
			16.15pm Meeting with MLSP stakeholder	
			15.00-17.30pm Internal Evaluation Team Meeting to discuss preliminary findings	
Friday	22-Aug	AM	10am-12pm Debrief with CO	
		PM	14.00-15.00: Debrief with CD	

Annex 7.   Findings and conclusions mapping

Conclusion	Supporting Finding
Conclusion 1: WFP rapidly established itself as a credible actor in Moldova, delivering timely and effective assistance while strategically aligning with national systems.	Finding 1 Finding 2 Finding 4 Finding 7 Finding 8 Finding 14
Conclusion 2: WFP's alignment of CBT delivery with national systems was successfully leveraged to provide meaningful and well-received contributions to strengthening MLSP cash delivery chains. These activities were well aligned with WFP's timeframe and digitalization emerged as a particularly impactful contribution.	Finding 1 Finding 3 Finding 5 Finding 9 Finding 22
Conclusion 3: WFP positioned itself to support policy and programme reform, but progress on system-level changes was constrained by its short operational timeframe. Success depended heavily on government interest, and WFP was most effective when contributing flexibly to longer-term efforts led by other partners.	Finding 1 Finding 3 Finding 4 Finding 6 Finding 16 Finding 17 Finding 18 Finding 19
Conclusion 4: Technical assistance alone cannot drive system-level reform; it must be paired with solutions to financial and political barriers. WFP contributed meaningfully by promoting coordination and helping link government to broader development financing.	Finding 4 Finding 6 Finding 9 Finding 15

	Finding 16
	Finding 17
Conclusion 5: WFP's contribution to social protection capacity strengthening was enabled by early strategic choices and flexible institutional systems. Hower, a faster transition from emergency response to longer-term engagement could have improved the depth of results.	Finding 1
	Finding 10
	Finding 11
	Finding 12
	Finding 13
Conclusion 6: The limited refugee caseload justifies WFP's decision to exit direct operations in Moldova, and the CO's deliberate approach to a responsible transition offers valuable corporate learning.	Finding 1
	Finding 2
	Finding 20
	Finding 21
	Finding 22

Annex 8. Key informants' overview

Inception phase people interviewed

Organisation	Number of Informants
WFP CO	13
Beneficiary	1
IOM	1
UNDP	3
MLSP	2
UNICEF	1
FCDO	1
WFP HQ	1
Grand Total	**23**

Data collection phase people interviewed

Organisation	Number of Informants
WFP CO	15
Balti Mayor's Office	3
Beneficiary	30
City Hall Ocnita	1
City Hall Stefan Voda	2
City Hall Ungheni	2
DG ECHO	2
Evisoft	1
Helpage Moldova	3
IOM Moldova	2
UNDP	3
UNFPA	1
UNHCR	3
MLSP	12
UNICEF	3
FCDO	1
RCO	2
STAAR	1
STAS	34
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	1
WFP HQ	2
WFP MENAEERO	2
World Bank	1
World Vision	1
Grand Total	**128**

FGDs beneficiaries

Location	SO	Number of women	Total number
Balti	RAC	3	6
Balti	RHH	1	2
Balti	CVM	2	2
Ocnita	RHH	3	4
Ocnita	CVM	1	1
Stefan Voda (Palanca)	RHH	2	2
Stefan Voda (Palanca)	CVM	2	3
Stefan Voda (Popeasca)	RAC	3	6
Ungheni (Todiresti village)	CVM	2	2

Ungheni	RHH	1	2
Total number of beneficiaries		**20**	**30**

Annex 9.   WFP MoUs and agreements

Title	Type	Partners	Date	Scope
Regulations on how to establish and pay emergency financial aid	Annex 1	UNFPA UNHCR UNICEF IOM WFP	November 2022 – April 2023	
Provision of Cash Assistance to vulnerable Moldovans households and integration of shock response into the national social protection system of Moldova	MoU	WFP IOM UNFPA MLSP	November 2023 – August 2024	Aims to build on the work previously conducted and complement the national social protection systems and ensure that vulnerable Moldovans can access crucial cash assistance to meet their essential food security, nutrition, and basic needs (including utility payments, winter clothing, etc) especially during the winter. Purpose of the programme: mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the Ukraine crisis and inflation on vulnerable Moldovan households.
Provisions of capacity strengthening to government institutions and integration of shock response into the national social protection system of Moldova	MoU	WFP UNFPA MLSP	November 2023 – August 2024	Purpose of the Capacity Strengthening to National Institutions on Social Protection programme is to build the capacity of different national institutions and entities under the MLSP and Central Authorities to enhance the shock-responsiveness of the national social protection system, thereby assisting the government in mitigating the socio-economic impacts of crises and shocks on vulnerable Moldovan households and ensuring the vulnerable Moldovans can have access to quality social services to meet their essential food security and nutrition needs.
Technical assistance project	Technical assistance agreement	MLSP	July 2024	This document has been requested by the Minister of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) to frame adjustments to the Ajutor Social Programme (AS) as a specific Project, tying together different forms of support from MLSP agencies and international actors, as follows. 1. To strengthen existing risk management processes to minimize programme risks and fraud regarding beneficiaries whilst minimizing the incorrect application of procedures by MLSP staff. 2. To operationalize Article 92 on Case Management attached to the Law

|				No. 133/2008 on Social Assistance1 ensuring this is linked to a common platform to better link Ajutor Social beneficiaries to other social cash transfer benefits, social care services and employment and labour-related services2 . 3. To add a shock-responsive capacity to AS to be able to scale up social cash transfers in response to ad hoc crises and emergencies
Statement of intent	Statement of intent	UNDP WFP	Signed sept/October 2024	Cooperation to support the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP) in digitalizing its national programs. WFP will assist UNDP with the RESTART Single Window Project by sharing information on relevant digital systems like SIAAS and UAHelp. In response to the Minister's request, WFP will enhance SIAAS's support for the Ajutor Social Programme through process mapping and operational adjustments. The collaboration will also focus on training MLSP staff to adopt these improved digital processes. Additionally, WFP and UNDP will strengthen MLSP's capacity to deliver cash payments in emergencies, drawing on their experience with cash transfer programs and contingency planning. This will better prepare MLSP to lead government emergency cash distributions during disasters or crises.
On the Rehabilitation of the social canteen in the village of Ursoaia, Causeni, Republic of Moldova, in the framework of WFP's Moldova Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP) 2024-2026	Agreement	Local public authority of Ursoaia Village (Causeni) in Moldova WFP	September 2024 – June 2026	To provide high quality food services backed by modernized and efficient management processes that ensure on-site access to nutritious meals to highly vulnerable local populations whilst building in emergency capacities to prepare for scaling up food services in the event of emergencies and crises. Enhance the capacity of the social canteen to become a regional food provisions facility, serving up to 1,000 vulnerable beneficiaries across the Ungheni raion.
Provision of cash assistance to vulnerable people in Moldova	MoU	MLSP WFP IOM	October 2024 – August 2025	Mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the Ukraine crisis, economic decline, and the fiscal limitations of the state budget which have an effect on the most vulnerable people. Vulnerable people in Moldova benefit from cash top-ups to support their food and other essential needs.

Donation agreement	Donation agreement	WFP MLSP	17 July 2025	
Strengthening professional development and capacity building for social protection systems in the Republic of Moldova	MoU	MLSP WFP	January 2025 – February 2026	To equip with the necessary skills and knowledge professionals in the social sector, improving the quality of service delivery to the vulnerable families, especially in remote areas.
Statement of intent	Statement of intent	WFP UNHCR	Dated in document title 09042025 but not signed?	The overall purpose of collaboration is to reinforce a strategic alliance to better empower the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) to better include refugees into their national social protection system as a more sustainable solution to support the protection and needs of refugees, with a specific focus on those covered by the Temporary Protection Regime. The partnership will also promote synergies as part of WFP preparation for a responsible exit from Moldova in 2026 and the downsizing of UNHCR emergency assistance across a similar timeframe
Development of a shock-responsive social protection capacity at national level, including piloting emergency support mechanism	MoU	MLSP WFP	May 2025 – February 2026	The objectives are: To utilise the response to the Durlesti Apartment fire as an operational case study for testing the implementation of a one-off emergency cash transfer, while ensuring that the immediate needs of affected families are met to support their emergency food and essential needs. Technical assistance is provided to develop and help put in place MLSP Emergency Cash Transfer SOPs and operational tools.
Localization and implementation of the refugee hosting household programme and strengthening of shock-responsive social protection under WFP's interim Country Strategic Plan (2024-2026)	Technical assistance agreement	WFP MLSP	July 2025 – December 2026	Establishes the framework for the cooperation between WFP and the MLSP aimed at supporting WFP's effort to strengthen the national shock-responsive social protection system through the localization and implementation of the Refugee Hosting Household (RHH) Programme.
Statement of intent	Statement of intent	WFP UNICEF	Document dated 150725 in	Collaboration to reinforce a strategic alliance to better empower the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) to deliver on its RESTART reform

			title but not signed	commitments and to enable a transfer of expertise and products developed for the MLSP from WFP to UNICEF as part of WFP preparations for a responsible exit from Moldova at the end of 2026. To achieve this, the Signatories will focus on three areas of cooperation: technical assistance linked to the MLSP-UN Technical Assistance Project, technical assistance and coordination roles promoting the government to support refugees and hosting communities, and, the transfer of expertise from WFP to UNICEF.

Annex 10. Lessons Learnt

1.   The following annex, supports Section 3.2 above, elaborating the factors that contributed to the successful entry to exit journey of WFP in Moldova.

2.   The specific experience of WFP in Moldova suggests that three broad factors contributed to the successful entry to exit journey: the integration from the start of the refugee response with the response to vulnerable host populations, which made capacity strengthening of the national social protection system the foundation of responsible exit, supported by strong strategic planning and partnerships and adaptive support services.

Figure 37 Factors Contributing to the Opening-to-Closure Journey of WFP in Moldova
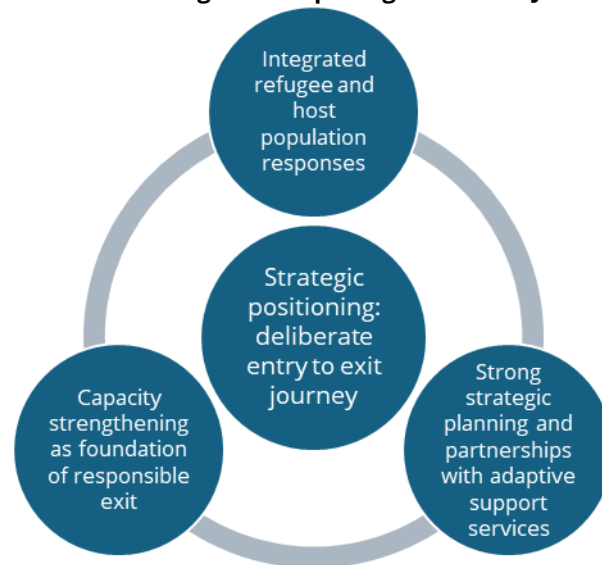
Source: Evaluation Team diagram

Strategic positioning shapes responsible exit

3.   *Operational choices in emergency response and its alignment with national systems have a decisive influence on WFP's strategic trajectory in any country. These foundational decisions shape programme orientation, guide the selection of social protection system-strengthening activities, and can significantly accelerate implementation progress, thus shaping the decision to exit.*

4.   In Moldova, WFP's decision to use cash-based transfers (CBT) as the exclusive delivery modality and to channel assistance through national systems from the outset positioned the organization as a strategic partner to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP). This early alignment steered WFP toward social protection system-strengthening, rather than a food systems approach linked to the Ministry of Agriculture.

5.   Through the four distinct phases of WFP operations, the concept and practice of an intentional and responsible exit matured, converging on a strategic model in which social protection capacity-strengthening activities were progressively scaled up as the foundation for sustainable withdrawal.

6.   The WFP Social Protection Offer ensured that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) was equipped with strengthened systems and lasting technical deliverables of enduring value for future crisis responses. Rigorous analysis and careful design from the outset are essential to ensure that capacity-strengthening interventions are sustainable. Technical assistance with standalone utility was prioritised, recognising the limitations of short-term engagement while maximising long-term benefits.

7.   WFP's post-production pathways for all digital tools, complemented by the production, publication,

and dissemination of operational manuals and the launch of e-learning tools further promoted sustainability. These initiatives were meant to ensure that knowledge, systems, and capacities continue to serve national objectives well beyond WFP's operational presence.

Integrated refugee and host population responses foster inclusive national systems and lead the way to exit

8.   *WFP's broad mandate supports its positioning in an integrated refugee and host population response. In a UMIC, this creates a conducive environment for responses through national systems from the start, which in turn supports WFP contributions to the inclusion of refugees into national programmes. The specific profile of WFP staff can further enhance this outcome.*

9.   In Moldova, WFP's entry, operations and planned exit were framed by the impact of the refugee influx triggered by the war in neighbouring Ukraine, the pre-existing economic vulnerabilities of Moldovans and the delicate political context. From the start, Refugee Response Plans reflected the broad consensus among partners on the need for international support to refugee hosting and generally to vulnerable Moldovan households.

10.   The early agreement that WFP would deliver gap filling interventions in the refugee response through food vouchers for refugees in RACs, cash transfers for refugee hosting households and targeted assistance to vulnerable Moldovans through EFA and CVM transfers, while UNHCR would provide cash transfers to refugees was seen as an example of good practice and mutually beneficial for the two agencies. Coupled with WFP's subsequent in-depth understanding of the national social protection system, this positioned WFP as a key contributor to the UNHCR-led efforts for refugee integration into national systems.

11.   Thanks to its overall positioning as a key MLSP partner for capacity strengthening, WFP was well-placed to enhance the MLSP technical capacity to respond to refugee needs. Technical preparation work included the development and handover of the UAHelp MIS which was designed to be the MLSP MIS for managing refugee integration into MLSP programmes.

12.   The experience of WFP staff enabled substantive contributions to finding solutions to integrate refugees within the social protection system. In particular, this included WFP's contribution to two UN-EU nexus workshops, which at a later stage helped to advance a proposal to include a refugee window in the multi-donor trust fund under UNSDCF, to bridge the financing gap as the RRP phases out in 2026. In a context of increased political willingness for inclusion, with progress mainly constrained by government fiscal limitations, WFP's advice to MLSP on potential funding meaningfully complemented its technical assistance to promote system change.

Capacity strengthening is the foundation of responsible exit

13.   *Developing a sustainable and responsible exit strategy through capacity strengthening requires time and deliberate planning. Building national capability requires realistic timelines and resources. There are several viable pathways for exit, including transitioning activities to government ownership, handing them over to other UN agencies with a longer-term presence, or closing them once objectives are met.*

14.   *While technical assistance is a key ingredient in capacity strengthening, it must be paired with practical solutions to financial and political barriers and designed to capitalise on WFP's flexibility and operational efficiency. These attributes are critical to supporting system-level reform and achieving sustainable results within complex national settings.*

15.   Moldova's mature institutional environment, strong government leadership and conducive policy framework enabled WFP to transition rapidly from emergency delivery to capacity strengthening as a credible pathway to exit—a scenario more feasible than in typical WFP contexts. WFP's flexibility emerged as a key competitive advantage. The Moldova experience reaffirmed that capacity strengthening is the foundation of a responsible exit.

16.   The Moldova Country Office also illustrated how responsible exit is a strategic achievement rather than a closure event. By conceptualising transition as a process of handing over strengthened systems and sustained capacities, WFP showed that exiting responsibly can leave national institutions stronger and more resilient.

17. The Country Office identified multiple exit options—transitioning programmes to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP), transferring others to UN agencies with long-term engagement in the country, and phasing out select activities entirely.

18. Designing a social protection offer that eased rather than increased fiscal pressure enhanced WFP's relevance and value. By acknowledging the Government's financial constraints and facilitating access to development finance for the MLSP, WFP demonstrated how humanitarian expertise can be leveraged to foster sustainable national ownership and institutional resilience.

Partnerships enhance speed and sustainability of capacity strengthening and support exit

19. *Short operational timeframes limit the extent to which WFP can influence system-level change. In such contexts, WFP is most effective when it contributes flexibly to longer-term initiatives led by other partners, while embedding WFP's work within the frameworks of partners with a sustained presence enhances sustainability and continuity.*

20. In Moldova, WFP's capacity-strengthening ambitions went beyond improving delivery efficiency to supporting broader systemic reforms, including the expansion of social protection coverage to refugees and the enhancement of national shock responsiveness. However, these reforms required extended engagement and could not be fully realised within WFP's limited operational cycle.

21. Consequently WFP sought operational partnerships from the outset of activities, both with the Government and other UN agencies, in a context of a high-profile emergency where leaders where generally strongly inclined to working cooperatively. As WFP pivoted to capacity strengthening, the nature and range of its partnerships adapted. Strong strategic partnerships were crucial for the handover of activities while exiting, supported by leadership of WFP in coordination fora.

22. Where WFP aligned closely with strong government priorities, such as the RESTART reform or elements of the refugee response, progress was more substantial. Similarly, where WFP contributed to existing partner-led initiatives, such as the UNDP-led digitalisation programme, the prospects for sustainability were notably stronger.

Strong strategic planning processes and adaptive support services support responsible exit

23. *Choosing to exit is a strategic decision that enables WFP to establish the conditions necessary for a sustainable transition, rather than merely closing operations as funding diminishes. A responsible transition requires significantly more time, structured planning, and carefully sequenced drawdown of staffing and activities than a standard closure. Adequate and predictable funding remains a key enabler for a well-planned and efficient transition process. Developing a corporate toolbox to guide such transitions would strengthen consistency and support country offices in managing responsible exits effectively.*

24. In Moldova, it took time for WFP to develop the strategic capacity required for deliberate exit planning. This capacity was achieved through the development of the Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP) and the appointment of a Country Director and key strategic staff, enabling WFP to conceptualize and operationalize its exit model. Progress was initially slowed by the extended transition from the emergency-focused Limited Emergency Operation (LEO) to the capacity-strengthening-oriented Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP). The evolution of staffing structures and capabilities, combined with the flexible allocation of funds for capacity strengthening, ultimately became key enablers of WFP's strategic positioning in Moldova.

25. A faster transition from the emergency-oriented Limited Emergency Operation (LEO) to the capacity-strengthening-oriented Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP)—combined with earlier recruitment of longer-term staff—could have enabled a deeper and more comprehensive capacity-strengthening portfolio within the available timeframe.

26. One year ahead of the initially planned departure, the Country Office established a Transition Task Force to monitor progress against a detailed transition matrix. This matrix itemized all tasks across programme areas and support functions, including human resources, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, security, and partnerships. WFP synchronised its staffing structure and financial resources with the exit timeline and allocated a contingency budget to cover the costs of transition, ensuring that the

process remained deliberate, well-coordinated, and sustainable.

27.   The robust funding allocated to WFP in Moldova was an important facilitator of an efficient and well-considered transition process.

28.   Supported by the Regional Bureau and Headquarters, WFP Moldova designed an innovative transition model in the absence of corporate guidance on responsible exit.

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ACRONYMS

AAR	After-Action Review
ACR	Annual Country Report
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AGSSSI	Agency for the Management of Highly Specialized Social Services
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
ANAS	National Agency for Social Assistance
ANSA	National Agency for Food Safety
API	Application Programming Interface
APRA	Ajutorul pentru perioada rece a anului
ATAS	Territorial Agencies for Social Assistance
BMA	Bureau of Migration and Asylum
BR	Budget Revision
CBT	Cash Based Transfer
CC	Cross-Cutting
CCs	Construction Contracts
CCS	Country Capacity Strengthening
CD	Country Director
CFM	Complaints Feedback Mechanism
CNAS	Casa Națională de Asigurări Sociale (National Office of Social Insurance of the Republic of Moldova)
CO	Country Office
COMET	CO Tool for Managing Effectively
CPB	Country Portfolio Budget
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CS	Capacity Strengthening
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
CVM	Cash to Vulnerable Moldovans
CWG	Cash Working Group
DAC	Development Assistance Commission
DE	Decentralized Evaluation
DEQAS	Decentralized Evaluation Quality Assurance System
DEQS	Decentralized Evaluation Outsourced Quality Support Service
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
EB	Executive Board

EC	Evaluation Committee
ECHO	European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EFA	Emergency Financial Aid
EGA	Moldova E-Governance Agency
EM	Evaluation Manager
EMG	Evaluation Management Group
EQ	Evaluation Question
ER	Evaluation Report
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
ET	Evaluation Team
EU	European Union
EVRF	Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCDO	Uk's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
FCV	Fragile, Conflict affected and Violent
FLA	Field-Level Agreement
FSP	Financial Service Provider
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GFFO	German Federal Foreign Office
GHQ	Global Headquarters (WFP)
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)
GMI	Guarantee Minimum Incomes
GRM	Grant Reporting and Monitoring
HCI	Human Capital Index
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
ICSP	Interim Country Strategic Plan
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IP	Implementation Plan

IR	Inception Report
ISWG	Inclusion and Solutions Working Group
IT	Information Technology
KII	Key Informant Interview
LEO	Limited Emergency Operation
MDL	Moldovan leu
MENAEE	Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe
MENAEERO	Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe Regional Office
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MIGA	Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
MIS	Management Information Systems
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPCA	Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance
MSNA	Multi-Sector Needs Assessment
MTCN	Money Transfer Control Number
NBP	Needs Based Plan
NDICI	Neighbourhood Development and Cooperation Instrument
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NOSI / CNAS	National Office of Social Insurance of the Republic of Moldova
NPB	National Public Budget
NPPIF	National Programme for the Phased Integration of Foreigners
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEV	Office of Evaluation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
QC	Quality Checklist
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
QS	Quality Support
RAC	Refugee Accommodation Centre
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
RHH	Refugee Hosting Household

RO	Regional Office
RRP	Refugee Response Plan
SCORE	Social Cohesion and Reconciliation
SEE	Summary of Evaluative Evidence
SEIS	Socio-Economic Insights Survey
SFTP	Secure File Transfer Protocole
SIAAS	Sistemul Informaţional Automatizat 'Asistenţă Socială'
SO	Strategic Outcome
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure(s)
SP	Social Protection
SRSP	Shock-Responsive Social Protection
SSIB	State Social Insurance Budget
STAAR	Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice, and Resources
STAS	Territorial Structures for Social Assistance
TDY	Temporary Duty
T-ICSP	Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan
TL	Team Leader
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TP	Temporary Permit
UMIC	Upper-Middle Income Country
UN	United Nations
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDIS	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNSWAp	United Nations Sector Wide Approach
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WFP	World Food Programme
WG	Working Group

WHO   World Health Organization

WVI   World Vision International