



World Food  
Programme

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# World Food Programme Strategy for Support to Social Protection

July 2021



# Foreword

**Social protection systems play a vital role in achieving a Zero Hunger world.** Effective investments and interventions which address poverty and vulnerability can help individuals and households to better cope with the threats to their food security. These programs provide support to people in need, help prevent temporary needs from becoming entrenched, support resilience-building and ultimately lay the foundations for more prosperous and peaceful societies. In so doing, they create a pathway to tackling some of the root causes of hunger and malnutrition.

**National social protection systems have the potential to improve the lives of billions of people — operating at a scale much larger than any humanitarian program.** The global COVID-19 pandemic has made this work more urgent than ever. At WFP, we partner with governments and others to establish and strengthen national systems in order to maximize the impact of our technical and operational expertise in the most cost effective way. Our global field presence and our history of reaching people in need in diverse and challenging contexts — including many communities living with conflict or protracted crisis — mean we can contribute a wealth of advice and assistance to help resolve the practical challenges of reaching Zero Hunger.

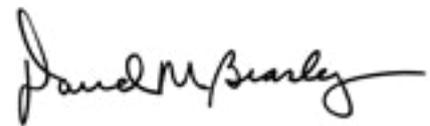
**WFP has been contributing to the field now known as social protection ever since the 1960s.**

It is an integral part of our work. In 2020, for example, when the pandemic swept across the globe, we worked with governments and others to strengthen national social protection systems in 78 countries.

**This strategy builds on WFP's extensive experience and consolidates our approach to social protection for the years ahead.**

The strategy offers a coordinating framework that outlines how we will systematically support efforts to achieve long-term national social protection goals, while continuing our work responding to hunger emergencies. It is informed by a range of operational and analytical evidence that illustrate how social protection activities help WFP deliver on its mandate, and enable governments to meet their global commitments.

Effective social protection policies are a way to make a real and lasting difference for billions of the world's vulnerable people as we work together on saving lives and changing lives.



David M. Beasley  
Executive Director

# Executive summary

## CONTEXT

**Social protection is essential if we are to reach Zero Hunger.** Hundreds of millions of people contend daily with food insecurity and malnutrition, poverty and inequality. These are often linked in complex ways. What's more, as the COVID-19 pandemic reveals, all people—whether currently in a vulnerable situation or not—risk welfare declines owing to shocks and stressors. Social protection is a cornerstone of policies that address these issues by redistributing resources and by interventions that help individuals or households to manage risks. It is an accelerator for many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Countries define social protection according to their context.** An interagency definition describes social protection as the, 'policies and programmes aimed at preventing, and protecting people against, poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life [...with] a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups' (SPIAC-B, 2019, p.1). These typically cover a range of cash and/or in-kind transfers; they may also include some fee waivers, active labour market schemes, targeted subsidies and/or social care services (see Annex B).

**Social protection can enhance food security and nutrition through several entry points.** Food security has four elements: food availability, access, utilisation and stability over time. Improving food access (by enhancing economic capacities) and stability (smoothing consumption during disruption) is intrinsic to social protection. Food availability and utilisation are less intrinsic and so require special attention. With respect to nutrition, social protection tends to be more effective when nutrition goals are pursued deliberately.

**Commitment to social protection by governments and their partners has long been increasing.** Many challenges remain, some already the subject of global cooperation and others meriting attention. These include expanding social protection across the three dimensions of the Universal Social Protection 2030 agenda—coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy; improving quality; and embedding programmes in a cohesive system. Taking better account of food security and nutrition considerations, and of extra needs in crises, are other important concerns.

## WFP'S ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL PROTECTION

**For the World Food Programme (WFP), poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion—the three conditions cited above as the remit of social protection policy—are part of three broader domains of concern, relating to needs, risks and inequalities respectively.** All three resonate with our mandate:

- **Needs.** Certain needs must be met for people to have a decent life—not just food but a range of essential needs, all of which can affect food security and nutrition—and social protection can help them attain it
- **Risks.** Social protection's risk management function is of primary importance to WFP as it can relieve some negative impacts of shocks and help build resilience
- **Inequalities.** The role of social protection in combating inequalities matters as these affect vulnerability. Opportunity and disadvantage are influenced by social, economic and/or geographical factors e.g. age, gender, disability or migration status.

In this strategy we focus on formal, public social protection initiatives that tackle these concerns.

**WFP has contributed to social protection for decades.** In 2020, WFP supported national social protection systems in 78 countries, especially in response to COVID-19.

**Our social protection work is aligned with WFP's twin roles in 'Changing Lives' and 'Saving Lives'.**

It is a route by which we enact our commitment to working 'at the nexus' of humanitarian and development assistance and peace. National social protection systems, with their annual expenditure of trillions of dollars, operate at a scale that is orders of magnitude greater than any international humanitarian response. By continuing to invest catalytic amounts in strengthening those national systems WFP aims to improve outcomes among the several hundred million hungry and malnourished—and those at risk—whom we do not reach directly and who may also need support if Zero Hunger is to be achieved.

**This strategy provides a strategic direction and a coordinating framework for ongoing activities.** Building on the 'Update of WFP's Safety Nets Policy' (2012), and following an evaluation in 2018–19, it contains new features including: consideration of major agreements since 2012, such as the SDGs, Social Protection Floor Initiative, USP2030 and Grand Bargain; a more detailed articulation as to how social protection can contribute to food security and nutrition; and a greater focus on strengthening the effectiveness of social protection in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, to build resilience and as a channel for shock-response.

**Feedback from our partners is clear and consistent about the value that WFP adds to our partnerships with governments and other actors working in this field.** These are: (1) our global footprint and frontline presence (2) our on-the-ground operational experience and strong 'delivery culture' (3) our analytical capabilities (4) our food security and nutrition expertise and (5) our ability to work across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

**We will adhere to principles that ensure we offer effective, context-specific support.** While remaining guided by our mandate, we will provide evidence-based support that starts from nations' own objectives and capacities and does not presuppose the adoption of any particular approach. We will keep people at the centre, maintaining a firm focus on accountability to affected populations. Collaborative partnerships are fundamental: we will align with UN Cooperation Frameworks, strive to avoid duplication and aim to add value by seeking explicit agreement about our contribution relative to others'.

## THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

**We set out our strategic framework in five parts** (see diagram on pp.26-27). These are: (1) Our vision (2) The priorities (3) Social protection for whom? (4) Modes of support (5) Areas of work.

### Part 1: Vision

**The vision for this strategy is that, 'By 2030 people will have substantially increased access to national social protection systems that safeguard and foster their ability to meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs, and to manage the risks and shocks they face'** (Figure 3). With this ambition we reaffirm our readiness to support nations worldwide in their pursuit of the commitments they have set for that date.

## Part 2: Priorities

**Two distinct but interconnected priorities emerge from the vision:** social protection that, first, helps people to meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs; and second, helps them manage risks and shocks.

**For the first, where appropriate, we will:**

- **Support 'food security-specific' or 'nutrition-specific' programmes** (i.e. where one of these is the primary objective), e.g. our support to school feeding, or to institutionalising lean season assistance
- **Support 'food security-sensitive' and 'nutrition-sensitive' approaches.** These are measures that consciously strive to increase relevant impacts in programmes (e.g. cash transfers) where these are not the main objective but that contribute hugely
- **Assist programmes that aim to reduce multidimensional poverty broadly even when a food security or nutrition lens is not directly applied, but in contexts where food insecurity and malnutrition are a major concern.** Examples could be programmes that promote income generation or human capital development.

**The second priority is closely related.** Shocks jeopardise people's ability to meet their essential needs; in turn, vulnerability to shocks is heightened if the ability to meet essential needs is already compromised. We aim to help address both idiosyncratic and covariate risks.

**The second priority comprises supporting improvements to social protection for resilience-building, and also for responding in contexts of disruption.** By building resilience we may reduce the scale of humanitarian needs, making efficient use of our resources for emergencies by not having to, 'save the same lives over and over again'. And when a shock hits, social protection can be a central response. Our approach depends on whether or not government services exist and are functioning. Whether for resilience-building or for shock-response we will continue to assist the expanded coverage, comprehensiveness, adequacy and quality of social protection.

**In respect of both priorities we will support the strengthening of the enabling environment that facilitates programme delivery.** This includes e.g. policies, institutional arrangements and evidence generation.

**Before committing to national system-strengthening we will always assess whether our actions are likely to create conflict or protection risks.** This is paramount in situations of active conflict where international humanitarian law applies, where actions directly supporting government programmes may not be immediately feasible. In such contexts the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are primary and will not be compromised.

### **Part 3: Social protection for whom?**

**All people have different needs, preferences and capacities, and face opportunities and disadvantages deriving from their unique circumstances.** Taken individually, the implications of identity markers such as gender, age or disability can be broadly characterised. However, nobody fits into just one category: everyone is disadvantaged by some identity markers while being privileged by others. The 'Leave no-one behind' pledge of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is rooted in the recognition that people have multiple inequalities, and attempts to mitigate them.

**We will mainstream considerations of social, economic and geographical identity in our social protection work.** This means that we do not focus on pre-determined population groups. Rather, we will aid national actors and their partners to conduct vulnerability analyses to identify how different attributes affect people's needs and preferences in a given context (including rapidly identifying emerging needs in covariate shocks). We will assist the design and implementation of social protection programmes adapted to people's needs and capacities, and the reform of the enabling environment so as to accommodate and/or address certain factors of vulnerability.

**For WFP, helping to address geographical inequalities is, and will continue to be, a major focus.** Where people live greatly affects their exposure and vulnerability to shocks and hazards—including conflict and protracted crises—which in turn are key determinants of food security, nutrition and many other outcomes. Many people live in places that are remote, hard to reach or poorly linked with basic services. Geographical disparities often intersect with other forms of deprivation, compounding economic and social exclusion. If we are to leave no-one behind we must step up efforts to support social protection for people living in difficult contexts, including in ways that contribute to prospects for peace and security.

### **Part 4: Modes of support**

**To implement the priorities, in our country-level assistance we will:**

- 1. Support nationally led systems and programmes.** We will work alongside, or on behalf of, governments and their partners on the design and delivery of national social protection, e.g. by providing advice and guidance or implementing on governments' behalf as needed and within our remit
- 2. Provide complementary actions in WFP's own programming.** Assistance in our own programmes—whether as an emergency or longer term response—will be made with a clear intent to strengthen national social protection where possible. Where national systems have gaps, we will explore opportunities to fill them. Conversely, where elements of the national system are operating, we will draw on and complement them. Not all of WFP's own programming delivers this complementary role, nor should it: sometimes a clear delineation is required between WFP as a humanitarian agency and national actors, or between emergency and development functions.

The approaches are neither mutually exclusive nor static over time.

## Part 5: Areas of work

**Adopting these objectives and methods, we have identified actions that can be grouped into four broad areas of work.** They are to:

1. Contribute to strengthening the national social protection system architecture
2. Support enhancements to the quantity and quality of national social protection programming
3. Improve the effectiveness of social protection in the shared space between humanitarian, development and peace actors
4. Build social protection partnerships and evidence globally.

**The first two comprise our assistance to national system-strengthening.** This covers, respectively, the overall system architecture (the enabling environment) and the programmes that deliver services. We conceive of national social protection as having 12 building blocks such as policy and legislation, or platforms and infrastructure delivery (see Figure 5). Across the two areas of work we explain how we will—and do—contribute to each.

**The third area covers our social protection activities consistent with our commitment to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.** These are particularly pertinent to situations of conflict, protracted crisis and fragility, including post-conflict contexts. Since the majority of the world's poor and hungry live in fragile and conflict-affected settings, a nuanced understanding of conflict-sensitive approaches is vital if social protection coverage is to be extended effectively to all.

**Finally, the fourth area explains how we will fulfil our commitment to an evidence-based, partnership-oriented approach, not only in countries but also regionally and globally.**

In social protection we have partnerships for operations, resourcing, knowledge and advocacy. Our activities range from joint advocacy and programming, to partnering to help governments mobilise complementary investments. We will contribute to the building and application of shared knowledge, through research and evidence-generation, communication and capacity-strengthening.

## ENSURING SUCCESS

**This strategy is being integrated into processes for planning, monitoring and reporting.** Internally we will align with WFP's strategic plans at corporate and country level, its thematic policies and standard monitoring practices. An illustrative theory of change (Figure 7) suggests how our priorities may be linked to WFP's national-level strategies, and identifies assumptions and risks. Beyond WFP, we place a high value on coordinating and ensuring complementarity with partners, particularly—but not only—with the UN. We also aim to maximise the relevance of our monitoring and reporting for governments and other national and regional partners.

**To deliver this strategy keeping pace with growing demand for our assistance, WFP must sustain and develop its capacities accordingly.** The skills themselves are not new to WFP. We are now being asked to contribute to social protection in most countries where we work and expect this to continue. Our approach to workforce planning aims to strike the best balance between building the capabilities of current employees, hiring to fill new positions and optimising the use of external experts.

**With this strategy and our commitment to continued investment, we aim to maximise the effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of our work with governments and their partners to establish and strengthen high quality social protection systems and programmes globally, as we strive towards our vision.**

# Acknowledgments

# Abbreviations

The World Food Programme (WFP) **Strategy for Support to Social Protection** has been prepared under the overall guidance of WFP's Social Protection Unit in close consultation with very many colleagues in headquarters, regional bureaux, country offices and field offices worldwide. We express our warm appreciation and thanks to all contributors, who have devoted substantial time to share their expertise and insights, exchange ideas and review drafts. The authors extend their thanks, too, to WFP's leadership team, the Oversight and Policy Committee, for their review and endorsement.

We are grateful also for all the comments and inspiration we received from interlocutors and reviewers beyond WFP, including in partner agencies and academia. An independent evaluation of WFP's 2012 Update to the Safety Nets Policy, commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation and undertaken by Avenir Analytics in 2018–19, formed the starting point for this new social protection strategy. We are most appreciative of their wide-ranging and thoughtful review and engagement.

The strategy presented in this document is the fruit of WFP's decades of experience in saving lives and changing lives, building not only on previous policies and strategies in the area, but also on practical operations and innovations in all the countries where we work. We enormously value our strong working relationships with governments and all our partners—including, of course, the communities with whom we work—and those engagements have contributed substantially and directly to the activities, lessons and ideas that have both prompted

<b>CODI</b>	Core Diagnostic Instrument
<b>COVID-19</b>	2019 novel coronavirus
<b>CSP</b>	Country Strategic Plan
<b>ISPA</b>	Interagency Social Protection Assessment
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SPIAC-B</b>	Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>USP2030</b>	Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

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