



**ECOSOC • Integration Segment (27–29 May, 2014)**  
**SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION**

**BUILDING  
THE FUTURE**  
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## **WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME**

### **Contribution to the 2014 United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Integration Segment**

# WFP and Urban Food Security

## Urban Food Insecurity

Rapid urbanization is changing the geography of hunger. The number of people living in urban areas is expected to reach 6.3 billion by 2050. The greatest share of this increase will occur in developing countries, with the number of people living in urban areas expected to double over the next 40 years.

Data suggest that an average household's food security and nutrition status improves when it moves from a rural to an urban area, which helps explain why people migrate to cities in ever greater numbers. Increased access to income opportunities, education and health services, electricity, piped water, sanitation facilities and more diverse diets are some of the most easily recognized benefits of urbanization for many people.

However, for people moving to the poorest parts of a city, and for those in households with high dependency ratios, low education and skill levels, and without stable income opportunities, migration may have negative impact on food security and nutritional status. This is particularly true for households that migrate from rural areas because of lack of livelihood opportunities or conflict. Many of the poorest migrants move to informal urban settlements in marginal areas that are often the most vulnerable to natural disasters.

It is critical for WFP to take into account fundamental differences in the causes of undernutrition and food insecurity in urban versus rural areas. These differences affect livelihoods, means for accessing food and living conditions. Characteristics specific to urban areas include:

- Household structures are usually smaller, with higher dependency ratios than in rural areas.
- Livelihoods are often precarious, informal, seasonal and poorly remunerated.
- The cost of living is high.
- Many urban poor reside in illegal squatter settlements, are vulnerable to eviction or forced resettlement and are ineligible for formal safety nets.
- Social ties are often weaker, with families and communities divided.
- Displaced people are increasingly moving to urban areas, where they lack access to services usually provided to people living in formal camps.
- Gender dynamics are altered in urban settings. For example, most women must work outside the home while continuing to care for children and perform household duties.

## Programme Implications

Targeted food assistance programmes will continue to be fundamental aspects of national safety-net systems for urban areas, particularly in times of crises and in the absence of secure livelihoods.

WFP's interventions in urban settings are guided by its 2002 policy "Urban Food Insecurity: Strategies for WFP" (WFP/EB.A/2002/5-B). WFP has addressed several challenges since the launch of the policy and has developed significant experience in urban programme design. Some lessons derived from this experience include:

- Traditional assessment approaches are insufficient: sampling methods often overlook the "invisible" poor and food-insecure in heterogeneous urban societies.
- Standard geographical targeting methods often result in inclusion errors in one area at the expense of food-insecure people in other areas. Community-based and self-targeting approaches can help address this difficulty, but have challenges of their own.
- The highly mobile nature of urban populations complicates programme targeting and monitoring, which often require a combination of methods.
- The security, political and legal dynamics of urban settings must be taken into consideration, particularly for identifying strategies for handing over to government ownership.
- Nuanced and integrated approaches using the most appropriate transfer modalities are required.

### **Types of Intervention in Urban Areas**

WFP interventions in urban areas – whether transfer programmes, capacity development or specialized technical services – vary based on local conditions and programme objectives.

Transfer programmes may be unconditional, particularly in response to an emergency. In 57 urban areas in the Philippines, in-kind food relief was provided in the immediate aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in late 2013. As markets were re-established, relief assistance was increasingly provided in the form of cash transfers.

Transfer programmes may also be conditional, as in the case of rehabilitation projects that contribute to recovery and build long-term resilience. In the most food-insecure areas of Freetown, Sierra Leone, WFP supported community asset rehabilitation from 2010 to 2012 through a seasonal cash-for-assets programme.

Institutional feeding programmes may be implemented or scaled up to target a specific segment of the population and achieve specific objectives. In highly food-insecure areas of Nairobi, Kenya, WFP has supported school feeding programmes that complement government safety-net programmes.

Support may also be provided for institutional strengthening, such as for disaster preparedness and response; vulnerability, nutrition and market analysis; and social and productive safety-net design, targeting and management.