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# FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

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☰ IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

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PROGRAM

# Implementation Guidelines Contents

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## Introduction

These Implementation Guidelines, outlined in the CODI (ISPA, 2018b), provide information on the process of conducting the assessment of a social protection programme (or more than one) using the FSN ISPA tool. They constitute an indicative outline of the steps and activities that should be undertaken to apply the tool in country. They are not intended to be prescriptive nor restrictive. Countries may adapt this guide to their priorities, depending on their needs, to the given context, as well as according to the availability of data and resources.

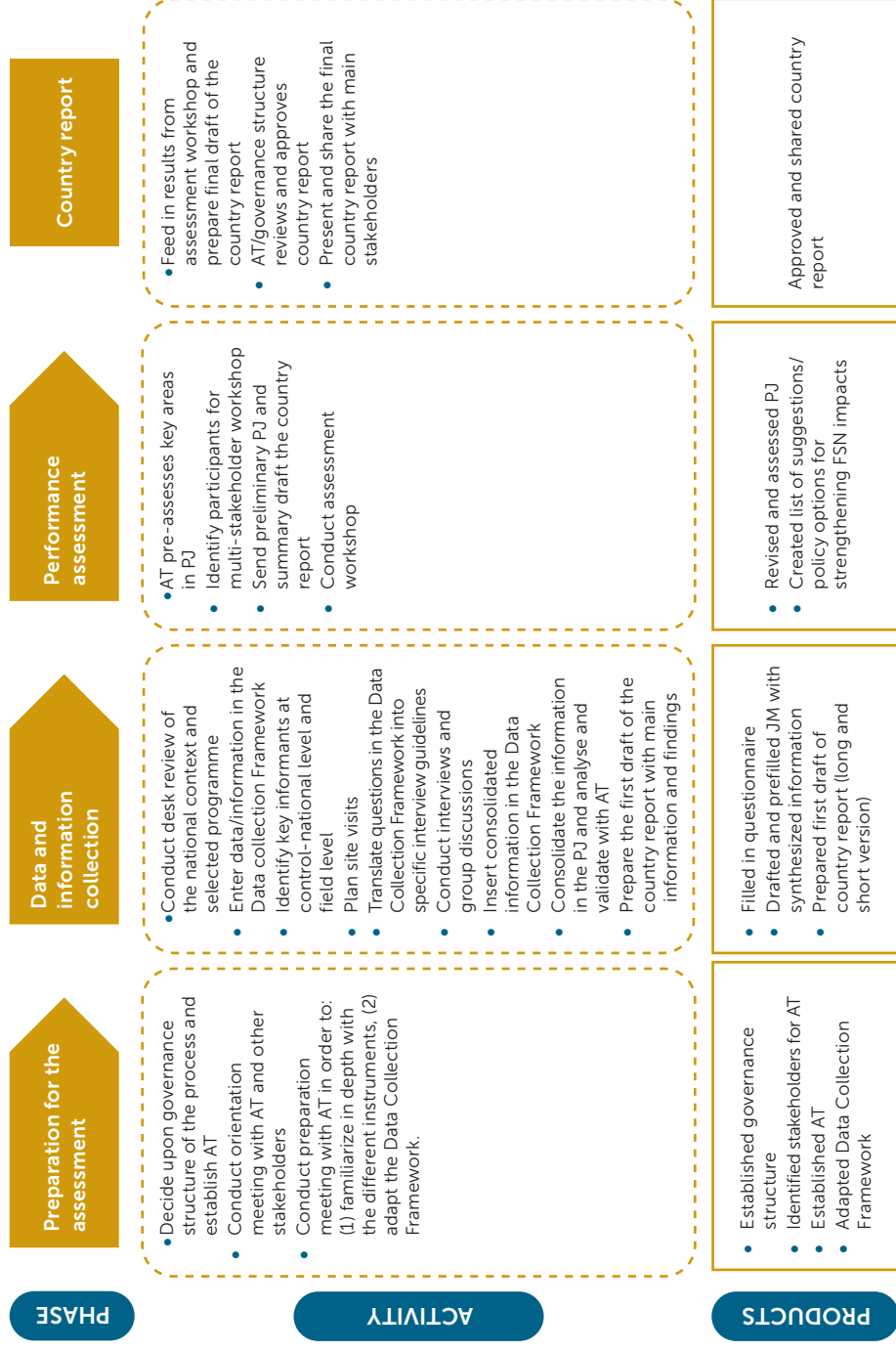
Generally, ISPA tools follow a similar structure and logic of: (1) taking stock of the existing situation in a given country, including legal/policy frameworks, and existing structures and practices; (2) analysing the performance of these structures against national objectives and a standardized set of performance criteria; (3) providing an evidence base for country dialogue on how to strengthen performance, taking into account local conditions; and (4) promoting exchange and coordination between national and international partners.

ISPA tools should be led by the country's government and involve related national stakeholders, including: relevant government ministries and agencies; social partners and civil society organizations (CSOs); national social protection practitioners and experts; international development partners (DPs); and the private sector—as stated in Annex A of the CODI Implementation Guidelines (ISPA, 2018b). Countries can also request technical assistance from international DPs for the implementation of ISPA tools.

## Phases of the Food Security and Nutrition Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessments Tool Process

The FSN ISPA tool implementation process is completed through both: (1) desk research/review of documentation and data compilation; and (2) in-country direct information/data collection through interviews and exchanges with key stakeholders (at central and field levels). It is estimated that about four months are required to conduct the full process of applying the FSN ISPA tool. However, this timeframe may vary depending on the complexity and the number of programmes being assessed, in addition to the availability of relevant data. Countries may adapt these guidelines to fit particular circumstances. It is advised that adequate time, resources and planning should be considered when preparing for the start-up of the assessment tool process. As regards quantitative data, the ISPA tools make use of existing data and do not

**Figure 1 Main Steps/Phases for the Application of the FSN ISPA Tool**



require the collection of new primary data. The main steps of the FSN ISPA tool process are organized in four phases and described in the following paragraphs.

- **Phase 1. Preparation for the food security and nutrition Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessment** (e.g. including: inception meetings; scoping mission; the identification of the general country context on the existing social protection system and programmes in place; main actors and roles to undertake the process; the Assessment Team – AT – and a steering committee; and stakeholder training as needed).
- **Phase 2. Data and information collection** (e.g. involving: the adaptation of the Data Collection Framework; the development of interview guides; national data compilation; expert interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and site visits).
- **Phase 3. Performance assessment** (e.g. entailing: summary documents of the data collected; an overview of findings based on the assessment criteria; a national assessment workshop; and working sessions with conclusions and options for a way forward).
- **Phase 4. Country report** (e.g. comprising all summary data, FSN analysis and recommendations, validated nationally).

The sections below, in Table 1, briefly describe the main activities proposed to carry out each step. Specifically, the first section, identifies the main actors, and role and responsibilities.

## Phase 1. Preparation for the Food Security and Nutrition Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessment

### Inception Meeting

Before the implementation, an inception meeting between the government, relevant ministries and DPs, supporting tool applications, is suggested to introduce the overall objective of the ISPA tools. It is also useful to highlight the potential value of the tools in improving the linkages between the social protection agenda and different dimensions, including FSN in the country. More specifically, it is important to: (1) attain an understanding of the main ideas behind the FSN tool, with national counterparts and DPs; (2) clarify the tool's relevance and timeliness for actual political processes at country level—and its limitations; (3) identify the potential challenges and opportunities of handling a practical application of the tool at country level, in particular as regards data collection; (4) understand the country context, government needs and priorities, and identify a strategic policy process linked to social protection,

to which the application of the tool can contribute; (5) define the FSN objectives that are of concern/priority for the government and can be addressed by social protection programmes; and, (6) identify possible programmes to be assessed under the FSN ISPA tool and/or other tools, and their potential in advancing national FSN objectives.

In order to select one or more programmes to be considered for the application of the tool, the following elements should be taken into account: (1) the relevance of the programme in terms of coverage of the vulnerable population vis-à-vis the needed population; (2) the interest in upscaling in the future and the application of the national budget; (3) a possible or evident link or contribution to FSN; (4) the potential to promote cross-sectoral coordination with different ministries and agencies.

Ideally the ISPA process should be guided by a higher-level steering committee. It is essential to identify strong government institutions with the convening power to bring all the stakeholders on board. ISPA partners, if involved, can support the convening power by calling upon their respective national counterparts.

## Establishing the Assessment Team

Once the government is clear about the objectives and value of the assessment process, and expresses interest in undertaking the assessment as well as identifying programmes to be applied in connection with existing national processes, the core AT needs to be established.

The AT comprises the main stakeholders in the country, who will serve as the central body responsible for orienting and participating in the assessment process. The composition of the AT can vary depending on the country context. In general, it is suggested that the focal points/representatives should be selected from the following:

- the main programme under assessment (preferably the coordinator or programme manager);
- the institution housing the social protection programme under assessment;
- the main FSN body(ies) in the country;
- the nutrition area, if separated from the FSN body;
- any other central institution/s with a strong focus on social protection and FSN;
- key relevant DPs, if any, following/supporting social protection and/or FSN;
- the DPs offering technical backstopping for the FSN ISPA assessment process, such as: the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ); FAO; the International Labour Organization (ILO); World Bank; the European Union;

UNICEF; the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP); and Save the Children, among others.

- any other notable national social protection and/or FSN organization/experts in the country, including from research institutions/academia.

The fact that the AT may include staff from the programme that is under assessed has both its advantages and challenges. The advantage is that the staff has a solid understanding of the objectives, functioning and challenges of the programme. Therefore, the buy-in is greater, as is the ability to complete the Data Collection Framework with the information of the programme. The challenges are that the data collection and its process could be biased if the independence of the assessment is not well addressed. Additionally, there is the risk that the pace of the implementation is slowed down due to the having the entire the team participating in the required activities. Responsible heads of division should be aware that the assessment requires a considerable length of time and the staff designated to participate in the AT should, as a consequence, plan their schedule accordingly. A possible suggestion to avoid the above-mentioned challenges is for independent researchers to be involved in the data collection exercise, in close consultation with the government.

It is envisaged that the AT should identify a core group of experts tasked with carrying out the technical work, assisted through the inputs provided by the larger group of focal points. This may likely require additional technical support to closely implement and aid the process. In this case, a consultant or consulting firm may be needed for one or all of the phases of the process, particularly the collection and consolidation of data as well as facilitating the assessment workshop and reporting. Details relating to the Terms of Reference are provided in Annex B of the CODI Implementation Guidelines (ISPA, 2018b).

In addition, ensuring that social protection and FSN can be called upon to assist in the process has proven to be necessary. This is particularly true during the initial stages, when the AT is being introduced to concepts, and in the assessment phase. It is highly recommended to carry out a training workshop with AT members to ensure a common understanding of the objectives of the exercise, key concepts and terminology, the ISPA tool and the process to be followed.

Another element to consider, in order to make the process smooth, is the definition of a higher-level steering committee, called the Task Force, to guide the overall process. This would relieve higher level officials of their involvement in the operationalization of the tool but engage them in the guidance of the key steps of the process. In this case,

the identification of a strong government institution, with the convening power to bring all the stakeholders on the board, is recommended.

Furthermore, it is advised that the developing agencies that are part of the ISPA process should support the application of the tool.

## Orientation Meeting

To begin the work of the AT, an orientation meeting with national (and if relevant, international) leading social protection and FSN agencies and representatives should be organized, and include the following objectives:

- present the FSN ISPA tool, explain the value, principles, content and process, and outline the proposed timing;
- ensure a common understanding, and attain the participants' endorsement and inputs/recommendations for the implementation of the programme;
- discuss and agree upon the basic Terms of Reference for the assessment, comprising the timing (work plan), nature of support (including from DPs), and the expected roles and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- agree upon the main milestones of the process (to be presented in the form of a work plan), notably the reviews, validation mechanisms, the assessment workshop, and the role of the AT and consultant, if applicable;
- promote a training session on the basic concepts of FSN and social protection linkages to leverage the participants' understanding on the main potential issues to be addressed with the assessment; and
- sensitize stakeholders to the information and data needs, and the inputs/collaboration required from each of them during the tool application process.

It is desirable that the orientation meeting should entail the participation of the assessment leader and consultant, all the key members of the AT (either in person or by audio/videoconference), and be extended to other essential stakeholders as appropriate.

The orientation meeting, in addition to the AT, should possibly gather representatives from:

- any other relevant line ministries and agencies in charge of social protection and FSN issues;
- social partners;



- CSOs and actors; and
- other pertinent stakeholders, according to the national context (e.g. academics).

To the extent possible, the AT should build on existing social protection and/or FSN-related structures, such as sector working groups or governmental coordination bodies, to convene meetings and mobilize stakeholders. Before delving into the methodology, it is recommended that all participants be familiar with FSN concepts and frameworks, as should be addressed in this workshop (Box 1).

## Phase 2. Data and Information Collection

The AT enters into the phase of collecting information and data to base the assessment of the social assistance programme in question. In order to do so, the tool comprises of a Data Collection Framework which identifies the main key areas to investigate as well as a supporting the collection and organization of data regarding FSN-related components and the outcomes of social assistance programmes. The questions themselves will have to be adapted to the type of programme being assessed, the country context, the methodology used and the agreed objectives of the analysis. The Data Collection Framework is a reference to ensure all important aspects are included

### Box 1 Different Forms to Implement the FSN ISPA Tool

The FSN ISPA may be implemented in three different forms (ISPA, 2018b):

- **Self-assessment:** a government may decide to complete an assessment on its own. In this case the assessment tool is free and publicly available, and can be fully country-led without the engagement of any DPs.
- **Demand-driven:** a government may request the support of DPs, which include in country and international agencies, the UN Resident Coordinator or the ISPA coordination team, to carry out a social protection system assessment. The coordination team channels the request and helps to coordinate DP participation for an interagency application of the FSN ISPA.
- **Supply-driven:** a DP may propose a FSN ISPA to a government and engineer its implementation. In this case, the application of the FSN ISPA is encouraged and supported by an agency, with the technical assistance of the ISPA coordination team. The agency initiating this process should invite other partners to participate for an interagency application of the tool. In the event that the FSN ISPA application is initiated by the agency itself, government interest, endorsement, support and commitment should be assured before carrying out the assessment.

in the analysis. This step also implies, if necessary, the translation of the developed Data Collection Framework or interview guidelines into local languages.

There are essentially two main steps concerning data collection: (1) desk review and basic data gathering, and (2) conducting interviews and FGDs with key stakeholders at the national and local level, in addition to site visits.

## Desk Review and Basic Data Gathering

Initially, the FSN ISPA AT will conduct a desk review of documentary evidence including: (1) background information on social protection in the country (i.e. policies, programmes, institutional arrangements, relevant legislation and frameworks/strategies); (2) the social protection programme(s) that are being assessed (through administrative data, operational manuals, annual reports, M&E frameworks, evaluation reports, administrative data, etc.); (3) the context of FSN in the country (by reviewing strategies, legislation, main programmes, national data, reports, etc.); and (4) relevant social, economic, demographic and political information, and the evolution of socioeconomic, FSN and poverty data (through rural-urban indicators, key gender data, etc.). The review will also include a mapping of the key FSN stakeholder and bodies as well as social protection bodies and agencies within the country, and comprise an overview of main roles. This process will support the identification of information gaps (in both the national context and selected programmes) and guide follow-up action with relevant stakeholders to access documentation/information.

Information and data should be collected at the macro-national level from a range of sources, including websites relating to the government, national statistical offices, development banks, UN agencies portals, non-governmental organizations and academic sources, among others. To the extent possible, national sources should be given priority. The governmental focal point within the AT should facilitate access to the information required.

This information will be entered in the initial sections/tables of the adapted Data Collection Framework. When collecting this information, the AT should also take into account the country report outline, in order to guarantee that the team collects all the necessary information. It is recommended that the Data Collection Framework should be pre-filled through with the information from the desk review prior to starting with the key informant interviews (KIIs). This will allow the AT to understand which areas are in need of more information and raise additional questions to be further enquired upon.

To begin, the context and state of FSN in the country should be summarized (using available data) to identify the immediate underlying causes and basic state of food insecurity and malnutrition, as well as the priorities that can be addressed by social assistance. This information encompasses key indicators, such as: energy and protein supply; depth of food deficit; domestic food price volatility; household and individual food consumption patterns; prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies in children and adults; prevalence of undernourishment, underweight, stunting, wasting, overweight and obesity in children under five or women of reproductive age; low birth weight; extreme poverty; and income inequality.

A review of existing national food security and/or nutrition strategies, policies, legal frameworks, data, programmes and other interventions can assess if this national backdrop has underpinned the programme objectives and design, and to what extent. Moreover, it can determine how the programme may be filling gaps and/or complementing ongoing initiatives.

## Key Informants

### Stakeholders at Central-National Level

After having reviewed the information of the programme(s), it will be necessary to identify the potential key stakeholders and experts to be interviewed (possibly on a bilateral basis) and determine an appropriate number of rural sites to visit for these discussions. Following the identification of the stakeholders, the AT will determine the relevant questions and the methodology to be used (e.g. KIIs, FGDs, etc.). Some stakeholders may have more in-depth knowledge about the implementation of the programme (e.g. programme managers), while others may have more information on the policy environment or the linkages. The lack of information or linkages is in itself a finding, hence the different stakeholders will have different amounts of relevant questions.

The Data Collection Framework will be applied mostly at national level through bilateral interviews (or focus groups with two or three people as appropriate) with the key stakeholders identified. To complete the Data Collection Framework and obtain the information required it may take from up to 10 to 15 stakeholders from different agencies and programmes, depending on the country context, and the number and type of programmes being assessed. It is important to consider carefully which departments or units should be contacted for interviews from each agency.

The Data Collection Framework is divided into seven thematic areas and is meant as a reference document. In order to conduct the interviews, the AT will have to prepare, adapt and add the relevant questions for each of the key informants, depending on their respective expertise and area of work. Each application of the tool will require different adjustments to the country context and stakeholders.

The information collected through the interviews is qualitative and complements the quantitative data gathered, in order to attain a complete picture of the programme. Unlike qualitative information, quantitative data requires to go beyond a simple yes or no answer and obtain as much detailed information as possible related to the issues in question. Therefore, it is important to explaining the “how” and “why” or “why not” for each answer in the “Please explain” box. When compiling the answers from the different interviews, it is essential to capture the various perspectives that have been provided, highlighting areas of contention.

For some question areas or questions there may be insufficient information. This is a finding in itself, that may result in prioritizing the need for additional collection of data or evaluations to obtain the relevant answers.

It will be necessary to use the data collected from multiple informant interviews (more than one stakeholder needs to be interviewed to complete the Data Collection Framework tool). Furthermore, a key important aspect of the data collection process, essential for completing the Data collection Framework, is “triangulation”. This consists in collecting and cross-checking information from different sources/informants in order to internally validate and strengthen the credibility of the information. It is also necessary to identify points and views of difference, clarify uncertainties and capture additional information, if relevant. In light of the fact that the FSN ISPA tool requires information from a range of stakeholders and triangulation of data to strengthen its reliability, the AT also needs to envisage and agree upon how to treat any contradictions in information. One way of addressing inconsistencies would be to present these for discussion at the AT workshop, as described in Box 2.

### **Site Visits**

Given the importance of programme implementation, linkages and impacts on the beneficiaries and communities, it is advised that some interviews are conducted in the field, if possible, in rural locations with varying socioeconomic, livelihood and agroecological contexts (to capture differences). This exercise should entail carrying out both KIIs and structured FGDs—with programme implementers, beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, relevant service providers, local leaders and others—to complete relevant

## Box 2 Illustrative Actors That Can Be Interviewed Using the Data Collection Framework

Some of the actors that can be interviewed include:

- the project management team of the social protection programme under review;
- staff from certain departments or units within social protection programmes (e.g. M&E and communication officers, claims department, registration officers, staff working on the delivery of benefits, case managers etc.);
- the ministries of social affairs, or equivalent;
- the ministries of economy and finance;
- the institutions responsible for food security (e.g. ministries of agriculture, or equivalent);
- the institutions responsible for nutrition, if different from the previous (e.g. ministry of health);
- other relevant ministries (e.g. the ministry of education, youth and sports, ministry of labour and vocational training, ministry of gender, etc.);
- local authorities and public service officers;
- local leaders;
- the beneficiaries; and
- DPs with key roles in the country. ot all questions will be applied to each actor. The choice of actors to be interviewed will be based on each national context.

questions of the Data Collection Framework and ensure the attainment of examples from the field.

A few key issues that should be addressed in planning the field visits include:

- Which sites should be selected to visit—based on what criteria, and key area?
- Who/what actors should be interviewed? How will the informant selection be conducted?
- Which methods (KII or FGDs) should be used with which informants?
- How should the interviews be structured/conducted? This should be defined appropriately beforehand as, for example, FGDs can last up to about one and a half hours.
- Who will organize and facilitate the visits? How much time should be spent on each site? An appropriate amount of time could be up to about two days.

## Consolidation of Information

Once national-level data is collected and the Data Collection Framework is completed, the AT should consolidate the information in the Performance Journal (PJ) and draft a brief summary (or a long version and a summary) of the main findings. The Data Collection Framework will contain detailed information from different stakeholders and the desk review. When consolidating the information, it is important to highlight the main findings, including the agreements and contradictions encountered.

The PJ is organized according to the seven key areas proposed by the FSN ISPA tool and each area is composed of key guiding questions to support the exercise. The consolidated information should be very briefly synthesized into the PJ.

## Phase 3. Overview of Findings

### Preliminary Assessment of the Key Areas

With the Data Collection Framework complete and the synthesized information, the AT can proceed to assess the performance of each key area. For this reason, the Overview of Findings (OoF) also proposes a four-point scale, which includes the following levels:

- latent;
- emerging;
- moderate; and
- advanced or full implementation.

It is good practice to begin by ranking the answer of the guiding questions as this will support the ranking of the overall performance of the key area. To assess the level of each key area and its guiding questions the tool includes a PJ to facilitate reporting the findings—see Module 4 of the CODI “What Matters” Guidance Note (ISPA, 2018a). Additionally, the Guidance Note includes how to utilize the OoF to facilitate the classification of the result in the point scale presented above (see previously mentioned Module 4). The matrix should be reviewed and discussed within the AT before its utilization, to agree upon how each key area will be analysed. During this activity it is strongly advised to have a FSN expert present—from the government, academia or an independent consultant. Should the four-point scale be judged as inadequate for the task, the AT may propose an alternative scale adapted to the national context.

The AT proceeds to pre-assess the key areas and give a rating reflecting the data to support the initial discussions. This will subsequently be discussed, reviewed and, if needed, changed or validated at the assessment workshop.

Prior to the workshop, the preliminary findings should be presented to the steering committee to attain feedback and provide further orientation in order to enable an in-depth discussion at the workshop.

## Multi-Stakeholder Assessment Workshop

A pivotal and main step in the FSN ISPA assessment process is the multi-stakeholder assessment workshop, a two- (or two and a half) day working session that serves as a platform for deepening dialogue among diverse stakeholders and policymakers to assess the existing situation, and strengthen social protection programmes. The AT should invite government representatives, social partners, CSOs, and other relevant stakeholders to review all preliminary results, and identify policy implications and options for enhancing FSN in social protection programme/s.

An example of an assessment workshop agenda is as follows:

1. **Presentation of the methodology:** at the beginning of the workshop, the AT should briefly present the overall methodology used to conduct the process of collection of information and the Data Collection Framework.
2. **Presentation of preliminary findings:** the presentation of the methodology is subsequently followed by the presentation of the preliminary results for each of the key area. Of note, prior to the workshop, stakeholders should be sent the preliminary PJ and a summary report.
3. **Division of the session into groups:** in order to examine the findings and identify policy options the AT should separate the participants into smaller working groups of mixed profiles, with at least one representative from the national government in each of them. A hard copy of the PJ and a brief summary of results should be distributed to all the groups. The latter should then be asked to assign a level/score to each key area, based on the findings and also their own information, and provide an explanation for their results. The groups are instructed to use the OoF as a reference, to additionally rely on their knowledge to add to the findings and identify a level for each key area. In sum, supporting explanations should be provided by the groups, for each level, and be based on the findings supplied as well as information from actual evidence (e.g. contained in official documents, programme reports and personal experiences).

4. **Plenary discussion of group findings:** at the end of the workshop each group should present their results in a plenary discussion. The overall level for each key area should be obtained through averaging group scores.
  - **Identification of a way forward:** the final key activity of the workshop should provide space for the participants to brainstorm, in plenary or smaller group work, on potential programme options to strengthen certain areas, particularly related to FSN impacts. The score results should be integral to determining priority areas for policy option focus. Lastly, following the completion of this activity, a summary/proposed list of policy options should be developed.

Once the workshop is concluded, it should be evaluated through a participatory process involving the participants completing a form, with several open-ended questions/qualitative assessments and possible suggestions for improvement.

The AT should capture all the workshop highlights and final conclusions in a workshop final report. This report should additionally include an annexed complete policy option matrix and, upon approval, should be disseminated among all the participants.

## Phase 4. Country Report

### Drafting the Country Report

One of the most important deliverables of the AT is the preparation of a country report that: summarizes the assessment process; provides a detailed narrative of the analysis carried out; contains highlights of the workshop; and the concluding policy and programme options to strengthen FSN in social protection programmes. In order to support the drafting of the report useful feedback such as comments, lessons and suggestions relating to possible improvements in addition to the overall process and development of the FSN ISPA tool, should be shared.

Depending on the context, there might be the need to prepare a report for wider circulation and a more comprehensive version for the small group of main/internal stakeholders.

The draft country report should be reviewed and agreed upon by the full AT, government-led agencies and any key stakeholders prior to its finalization. An adequate amount of time needs to be contemplated and allotted for this process of exchanges and validations. The report should annex the PJ, workshop policy option matrix, summary of the workshop evaluation and any other essential items.



## Presenting the Final Country Report

To complete this phase of the FSN ISPA assessment, a final national presentation of the FSN ISPA assessment process results (i.e. the final report) should be held for the main national stakeholders.

The report should be about 30 pages long and should cover: 1) the methodology adopted for the implementation of the tool; 2) a description of the country context in terms of the FSN situation, existing social protection systems/programmes and, particularly, the selected social protection programme; c) a description of the main findings of the data collection, by key area, including information recorded during the field visit to enrich the findings; d) the main results from the assessment workshop, including priorities to strengthen the areas identified as weak or latent; e) potential ways forward; f) an annex with a list of important information to document the implementation process, ideally including feedback from the implementation process (i.e. main strengths and challenges to improve the tool).