

Providing children with nutritious school meals can lift entire communities out of poverty and onto the road to sustainable development. When integrated into comprehensive school health and nutrition approaches, these programmes can provide safety nets that fuel and sustain educational opportunities, social protection, sustainable food systems, gender equality and economic growth.



CHANGING LIVES

School Based Programmes

Investing in Children and Communities through School Health and Nutrition

We are living through the most profound education crisis in recent history, which will have consequences for generations to come. About 70 percent of 10-year-olds in low-income countries cannot read or write a simple sentence.

Part of that is because, although we've been able to get more children into school, they are too sick or too hungry to learn. Approximately 300 million schoolchildren in low-and-lower-middle income countries suffer from anaemia leading, on average, to a 6-point drop in IQ. About 73 million most vulnerable school-aged children in 60 low and lower-middle-income countries are still waiting to receive school meals.

School meals and school health and nutrition programmes can help to address our education and food system challenges, while also providing communities with stability and prosperity. School meals provide a social safety net to children (especially girls, refugees and IDPs), financial incentives to parents (freeing up disposable income for other essentials such as health, shelter, and food storage), better and more sustainable diets for children, women's economic empowerment through Home



Grown School Feeding programmes, as well as contributing to the stabilisation of local markets by creating jobs. These benefits help to strengthen weakened education and food systems and address food insecurity and malnutrition.

WHY WFP?

Working in partnership with governments, and with sufficient financing in place, WFP can help to establish and strengthen national school meals programmes that will contribute to multiple Sustainable Development Goals: address poverty (SDG1), hunger (SDG2), health and wellbeing (SDG3), education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG5), economic growth (SDG8), reduced inequality (SDG10) and global partnerships (SDG17).

WFP's technical and policy support has indirectly influenced the quality of life, access to education and nutritional status of 107 million schoolchildren in 77 countries. When necessary, and particularly in low-income or fragile contexts, WFP provides school meals to vulnerable children in support of national objectives. In 2022, WFP provided school meals to more than 20 million children in 59 countries.

MOVING FORWARD

Returns on school meals are truly impressive - up to US\$9 on each dollar spent, because of their multisectoral returns. School meal programmes are at the very top of the list of “best buys” in development identified by the Copenhagen Consensus Exercise.

Enabling and supporting nationally owned sustainable programmes

In lower-middle income countries, we support governments (through their national policies, strategies, and sustainable finance) to transition to nationally owned and self-reliant programmes.

Despite a global recovery of school meal programmes, low-income countries' coverage remains 4% below pre-pandemic levels and only about 18% of children currently benefit from daily school meals. In low-income countries and fragile contexts where national capacity is lacking, WFP is working in collaboration with the government and the international community to ensure these programmes are scaled up to support the hardest-to-reach and most vulnerable children.

To ensure that every child can receive a healthy and nutritious daily meal in school, the sustained support of partners is essential.

Working across sectors

School meals have a wide range of benefits beyond the education and nutrition of children. School meal programmes can impact the agriculture sector by supporting farmers to grow and sell food to schools, shorten value chains and improve the sustainability of production approaches; the health sector by integrating measures such as fortification to prevent anaemia, malaria control and vaccination; the social protection sector by making sure these programmes are embedded in the wider system.

Forging Global Partnerships

Co-chaired by France, Finland, and Brazil, the government-led School Meals Coalition was launched at the UN Global Food Systems Summit in 2021. As of January 2024, the Coalition has grown to 98 member

governments and 115 partner organizations. Member states have pledged to re-establish school meal programmes lost to the pandemic; reach the 73 million vulnerable students who did not receive meals even prior to COVID-19; and strengthen the quality and efficiency of school meals — all these by 2030. Since its launch, the School Meals Coalition has already achieved its first goal of re-establishing school meal programmes to pre-pandemic levels, has created unprecedented momentum, and many member states are showing impressive early results in the scale up of their national programmes. WFP has been a proud supporter of the Coalition since its start and serves as its secretariat.

COUNTRY EXAMPLES



Rwanda went from covering 640,000 children two years ago, to 3.8 million children now, increasing domestic budget allocations for school feeding from US\$8 million to 80 million. WFP has partnered with Rwanda in this process and helped the government design and roll out the national programme.



Benin has now reached 75 percent of coverage of school meals funded with domestic resources. The government hopes to cover 100 percent of the children in the next two years. President Talon has committed US\$270 million dollars of the national budget to implement the programme, which is run with the support of WFP.



Honduras has revived the national school meals programme after two years of political instability. The government has just committed US\$65 million of domestic resources to reach 1.3 million children, with the support of WFP.