



SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Two Minutes on School Meals

ABOUT SCHOOL MEALS

Making sure children are healthy and well-nourished is crucial to their ability to grow, learn and thrive. School meals support children to become better learners in school and to improve their overall wellbeing. They benefit the whole community: they constitute one of the most extensive social safety nets in the world, can strengthen local, sustainable food systems and economies, create jobs, and support climate action.

WFP understands school meals as the provision of meals, snacks, or take-home incentives through schools conditional upon the attendance of children:

In-school meals and snacks: Children are provided with breakfast, lunch, or both, while in school. Meals are either prepared at the school, in the community or are delivered from centralised kitchens. Some programmes provide complete meals, while others provide fortified foods such as rice or nutritious snacks,

high-energy biscuits, or date bars. As often as possible, food is procured locally.

Take-home incentives: Families receive food and/or cash rations on the condition that their children attend school regularly. In-school meals, combined with these incentives, help to lower drop-out rates, and bring more out-of-school children into the classroom.

THE NEED FOR SCHOOL MEALS

School meals are an essential safety net which helps to ensure that every child has access to education, health, and nutrition. For the more vulnerable students, enrolling in school, attending regularly and learning is often made more difficult by illness, hunger, and malnutrition. In many parts of the world, children from vulnerable families are often pulled out of school when they are needed to work at home. When girls are out of school, they are more vulnerable to forced marriage, early pregnancy, and gender-based violence. For these children

and their families, a daily meal or snack can be a strong incentive to keep their children, especially girls, in school.

THE MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF SCHOOL MEALS

Every US\$1 invested in school meals yields up to US\$9 economic return, owing to improved health, education, and productivity:

Education and learning: School meal programmes promote education by removing barriers to accessing classrooms and learning. A daily meal at school allows children to focus and helps increase enrolment and attendance, promotes retention rates, and improves cognitive abilities. Studies have shown programmes can increase enrolment by an average of 9 percent. In areas where there are prevalent barriers to education, including child labour, early marriage, or gender inequalities, school meal programmes may be tailored to target specific groups of children (e.g., adolescent girls, children from marginalised communities etc.).

Nutrition and health: Especially in vulnerable and marginalised communities, nutrition-sensitive school meals can offer children a regular source of nutrients that are essential for their mental and physical development. WFP strives to include fortified and fresh foods to ensure meals are as nutritious as possible. When school meals are combined with de-worming and micronutrient fortification, the effects of such investments are multiplied. For the growing number of countries with the double burden of malnutrition (undernutrition and emerging obesity problems), well designed school meals can help set children on the path towards healthier diets and behaviours.

Social protection and safety nets: School meals are one of the most extensive social safety nets in the world, providing daily support and stability to vulnerable families and children and supporting the sustainable development of whole communities. The food provided in school constitutes a direct transfer to households by

reducing their food needs and hence increasing families' disposable income. For vulnerable families, the value of meals in school can be equivalent to about 10 percent of their income for families with several children, this can mean substantial savings and can help break the intergenerational cycle of hunger and poverty, which affects the world's most vulnerable areas.

Local economies and agriculture: Through home-grown school feeding approaches, food is sourced directly from smallholder farmers and local traders. Buying local food creates stable markets, boosts local agriculture, impacts rural transformation, and strengthens local food systems. Home-Grown School Feeding thereby directly injects money into the local rural economies and can stimulate income opportunities along the supply chain. WFP supports home-grown school feeding programmes in 56 countries, and there is growing demand from national governments for technical assistance in this area.

SCHOOL MEALS POWERING CLIMATE ACTION

Home-Grown school feeding programmes, where school meals are procured locally, can play a significant role in a country's response to climate change:

- Local procurement can help shorten food chains through shorter distances of transport and by reducing the need for internationally imported food - reducing the meals' carbon footprint.
- Shorter food chains also allow for smaller, more frequent orders and reduced storage times, which can help to minimize food waste.
- Local procurement provides a large, predictable market to local farmers and can support them to adopt climate smart and green agricultural practices.

By encouraging green cooking solutions in schools, school meal programmes have yet another entry point to reduce carbon emissions,

whilst also reducing deforestation, protecting the health of cooks, providing better working conditions, and reducing fuel costs.

In many countries, school feeding is the largest source of government procurement of food; Making these meals more sustainable can therefore have a substantial impact on a country's greenhouse gas emissions and can act as a policy lever and model for positive change.

A GLOBAL COUNTRY EFFORT TO RESTORE SCHOOL MEALS

While the world is still facing multiple crises due to conflict, climate change, and rising food and fuel prices, governments worldwide are increasingly convinced that school meals are a powerful and cost-effective way of ensuring that vulnerable children get the food they need, and have made school meals one of their priorities.

Today, 418 million children benefit from school meals worldwide, 30 million more than the 388 million children reached before the pandemic in early 2020.

The School Meals Coalition has been a driver for political commitment and vastly facilitated the restoration of programmes by encouraging national political leadership. Between 2020 and 2022, the global investment in school meals increased by US\$5 billion, from US\$43 billion to US\$48 billion. 99 percent of this budget is shouldered by governments, who increase their domestic financing.

At the time of writing, the Coalition counts more than 89 member countries and 98 partners from north to south; and it continues to grow. The Coalition has a unique power of gathering stakeholders' support and governments' commitments and many concrete examples at national level could be observed since its launch; countries increasing national budgets or strengthening and institutionalizing programmes.

As a result of this global effort, one of the Coalition's objectives, to restore school meal programmes to pre-pandemic levels, has already been achieved.

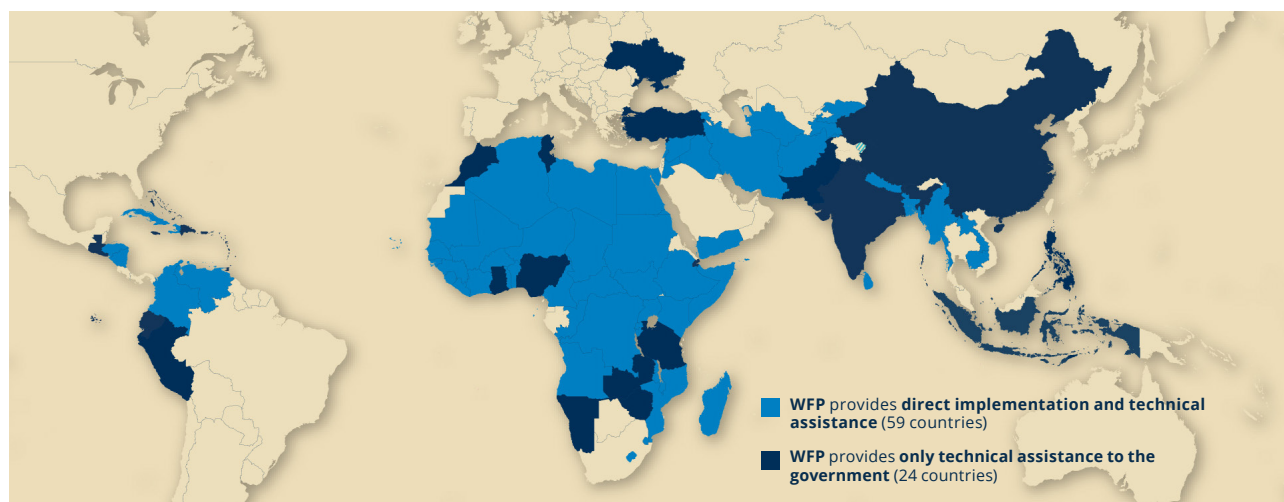
WFP'S WORK ON SCHOOL MEALS

WFP has six decades of experience supporting school meals and a trajectory of working with more than 100 countries to set up sustainable national school meal programmes.

In 2022, WFP supported governments to establish or expand national school feeding programmes, which reached 107 million children, while also directly providing healthy meals, snacks or cash-based transfers in 59 countries to more than 20 million schoolchildren, often using locally-produced nutritious food. WFP also scaled up school meal operations in humanitarian or fragile settings in 16 countries.

In response to the effects of the global food and fuel price crisis, WFP is strengthening its school meal operations in countries facing higher food and fuel costs to ensure that children receive healthy and nutritious meals in schools.

WFP SUPPORT TO COUNTRIES IN 2022



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