State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024

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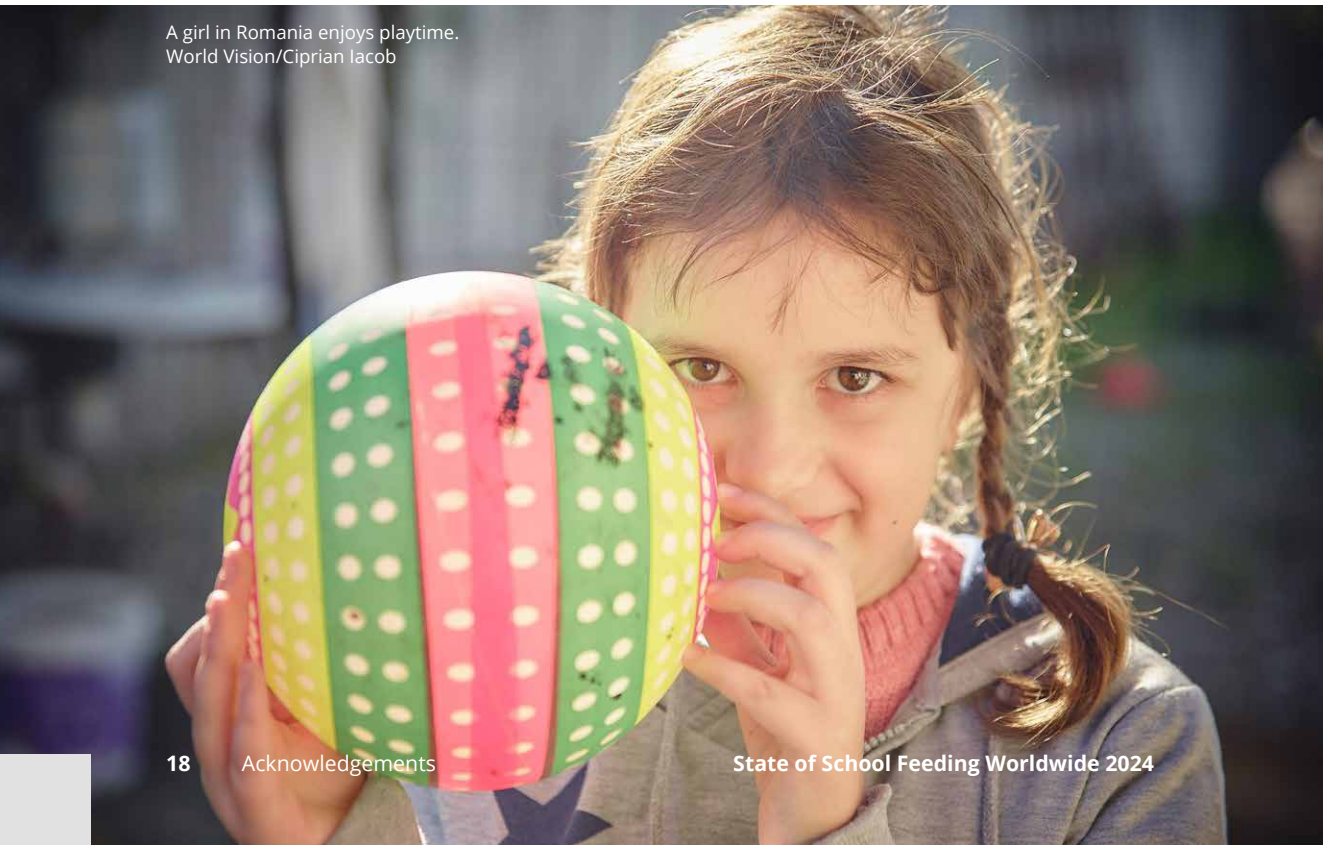
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A girl in Romania enjoys playtime.
World Vision/Ciprian Iacob

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Foreword

Over the past four years, governments around the world have shown inspiring leadership and commitment to shaping a better future for their children. Across continents and income levels, countries have expanded school meal programmes to increase the number of students they support by 20 percent – reaching a historic milestone of 466 million. Their achievements are all the more impressive as they include the period of profound disruption to economies and education systems sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Governments' determination to stay the course reflects the growing global consensus on the value of school meal programmes, which offer so much more than simply a plate of food. School meals give children the precious gift of education and a passport out of poverty into a life of expanded opportunities. They also enable governments to strengthen food systems – supporting communities, smallholder farmers and national economies.

The School Meals Coalition has been a dynamic engine powering this momentum and mobilizing countries around the school meals agenda. I'm immensely proud that the World Food Programme has played a pivotal role in the Coalition's work and will continue to support this innovative model of multilateral partnership.



Students in Cambodia read in the school library. WFP/Darapech Chea

To date, 108 nations have signed up to the Coalition, which is also supported by 144 partner organizations and six regional bodies. Over 50 member countries have pledged to expand or improve their school meal programmes, accounting for roughly two thirds of global progress in recent years. More than that, the collective work of the Coalition has helped change hearts and minds on school meals beyond its membership.

The State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024 honours the achievements of policymakers, national and local institutions, schools, educators, farmers and local communities. Their collective efforts and voices are transforming the lives of children around the globe one meal at a time.

There is still a long way to go, and much to do, before school meals are available to all – especially in the poorest and most fragile countries. Yet I am confident we will reach our destination. Now more than ever, we must build on the momentum of recent years and collaborate to ensure that every child, in every corner of the world, has hope for a brighter future that starts with a healthy meal at school.

Cindy H. McCain
Executive Director



Key Messages

Almost 80 million more children have been reached by national school meal programmes in the last four years, to reach a new global total of 466 million children.

- Globally, and at all income levels, most school meal programmes have achieved high coverage or are continuing to expand. Importantly, the largest improvements have occurred where the needs are greatest, with low-income countries achieving the fastest growth rate of almost 60 percent over the last two years.

- The African continent has experienced the biggest gains, with nearly 20 million more children covered. Over the last two years Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar and Rwanda have expanded their coverage between 1.5 and 6-fold.

- Several countries have launched national school meal programmes for the first time, including Canada, Indonesia and Ukraine. Among the countries taking significant steps towards national school meal programmes is Denmark, which has committed to establishing a National Pilot Scheme for school meals, aimed at putting in place a knowledge and experience base to inform the future national programme. The coverage of these new programmes is not yet captured in current estimates but lays the foundations for a significant expansion of future global school meals coverage.

- Global investment in school meal programmes by countries has expanded to support the new higher coverage, and now stands at US$84 billion annually. As seen in previous years, these are national investments with 99 percent coming from domestic budgets.

- Despite these gains, there are important remaining challenges. In particular, an estimated half of primary school children not yet reached are largely those most in need: coverage is just 27 percent in low-income countries, compared to 80 percent in high-income countries.

- Across regions and income levels, countries have focused on strengthening the quality of school meals through the institutionalization and adoption of policies and legal frameworks. Globally, 107 countries reported having a school meals policy in place, with lower-middle-income countries showing the greatest increase since the previous edition of this publication.

- While national governments define frameworks for action, subnational entities (including municipalities) often play a very direct role in the delivery of school meals. For the first time, this publication highlights data and examples from cities around the world.

- Recent shifts in international aid architecture and reductions in Official Development Assistance risk stifling further progress. While international donor funding has grown by over 20 percent, particularly in low and lower-middle-income countries, this continues to represent only a modest investment compared to the scale of government contributions.

The unprecedented expansion of national programmes reflects the emergence of the School Meals Coalition of 108 countries as one of the world's most successful and action-oriented multilateral initiatives to emerge from the COVID pandemic.

- The Coalition continues to grow rapidly. It now includes 108 member governments, 144 partner organizations and six regional bodies working to ensure all children have access to healthy and nutritious meals in school by 2030.

- Coalition member countries are leading the action. To date, almost half the member countries have begun pursuing ambitious commitments to scale up and improve their school meal programmes. As a result, some 32 million more children are now receiving school meals: about two thirds of the total global increase in the last two years.

- The Coalition's initiatives have played a key role, attracting and networking global expertise and knowledge. The *Research Consortium* now benefits from a Global Academy of nearly 1,200 professors and practitioners from approximately 330 organizations across 110 countries, while the *Cities Feeding the Future* initiative links more than 300 cities through the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact.

- This strong multilateralism, led by governments and supported by knowledge networks, has led to increased recognition of school meals as an important contributor to government public policy. For example, Brazil and Kenya committed to increasing farmer participation in their programmes, focusing on a planet-friendly approach; Burundi, Ethiopia and Rwanda prioritized sustainability and scale-up through increased national budget allocations; and Indonesia and Ukraine recently introduced and committed to a rapid scale-up of their national school meal programmes to advance multiple development goals.



A boy in Cuba presents the vegetable-packed pasta that he cooked. WFP/Yursys Miranda

Aggregated benefits across multiple sectors make school meals an exceptionally cost-effective investment in national development.

- Evidence from the latest value-for-money country studies, based on the additive benefits across sectors, shows consistent cost–benefits at both national and subnational levels, in the range of US$3–US$9 per dollar spent.

- Efficient school meal programmes have been shown to contribute to all the following sectors:
  - **Learning:** In addition to recent UNESCO announcements about the importance of learner well-being for educational achievement, a systematic review of available trials shows that school meal programmes have an impact on learning outcomes.
  - **Social protection:** The latest World Bank data confirm that school meals continue to be the most ubiquitous social safety nets in the world. The COVID-19 pandemic and 2008 financial crisis both provided counterfactual evidence of the safety net role for school meals, as well as evidence on the adaptability and resilience of school meal programmes and their ability to temporarily expand and absorb shocks.
  - **Job creation:** School meal programmes play a key role in direct and indirect job creation. National programmes typically generate approximately 1,500 jobs for every 100,000 children who receive school meals. This estimate does not include the significant indirect employment opportunities for local farmers and supply-chain actors.
  - **Health and nutrition:** Regular access to nutritious meals at school has been linked to reduced micronutrient deficiencies, addressing undernutrition and reduced incidence of anaemia. Improved diets have been associated with increased attention, higher cognitive function and reduced absenteeism. School meal programmes also contribute to better hygiene practices and food security, particularly in low-income settings.
  - **Planet-friendly diets:** The seminal white paper on school meals and food systems, authored by 164 individuals from 85 organizations, shows that school meals can shift life-long dietary preferences towards those that are healthier and more sustainable. Direct experience of healthy foods as part of school meals, combined with food education during school age and adolescence, can be an important driver of behaviour change and help transform society's relationship with food.
  - **Agriculture and food systems:** Procurement of food which responds to healthier and more sustainable diets is a major causal route to help transform food systems. There is also an emerging important role in encouraging sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices. Local procurement of school food can create reliable and predictable markets for smallholders and family farmers, which encourages crop diversification and boosts rural economies.
  - **Girls and women's empowerment:** Girls experience a differentiated and larger effect from school meals than boys, specifically when it comes to school attendance, dietary diversity and overall health and well-being outcomes. In a number of contexts, school meals contribute to overcoming barriers to girls' access to continued education. For women, school meals can be linked to economic empowerment, through strengthening their participation in local food supply chains and direct job creation.

WFP's role has evolved and continues to adapt to a new development model led by countries and communities through the multilateral global movement on school meals.

- WFP plays a supportive role on global school meals, with governments at the centre of this remarkable expansion. WFP is stepping up its role as a convener and facilitator of partnerships, research and advocacy; and investing in supporting national systems through technical assistance and policy support.

- As the School Meals Coalition's secretariat, WFP has supported the Coalition every step of the way since its creation in 2021, helping to create the right conditions for the Coalition to function and thrive, fostering a collaborative ecosystem between the rapidly increasing membership of governments, partners and network of experts.

- WFP has enhanced investment in policy support and contributed to the longer-term institutionalization of national school meal programmes across all operational contexts. The share of low-income, WFP-supported countries without a national policy dropped from 40 percent in 2020 to 15 percent in 2024.

- In 2024, 139 million children received school meals in WFP-supported countries, up from 108 million in 2020. This increase is mainly due to government-led programmes backed by WFP's technical assistance, highlighting growing national investment and sustainability.

- In response to the changing policy landscape and increased national ownership of school meals, WFP has transitioned programmes in middle-income countries to prioritize fragile and low-income contexts. In 2023, 15 million of the 21 million children supported directly by WFP were in these high-need areas.

- WFP will continue to prioritize children in the most vulnerable and fragile settings for direct delivery of school meals to safeguard their access to education and nutrition in the wake of increased global uncertainties and reductions in external funding.
  At the same time, WFP will work with governments and partners to support the capacity of national programmes to rapidly expand and absorb shocks.

Executive Summary



Children playing outside in Venezuela.
World Vision/Luis Colmenarez

Executive Summary

The *State of School Feeding Worldwide* was first published in 2013. Since 2020, it has developed into WFP's flagship biennial publication. The 2020 edition celebrated a decade of consistent growth in the provision of school meals, while noting the arrival of COVID-19 and concern about the subsequent school closures. The 2022 edition highlighted the destructive consequences of these school closures: the virtual collapse of school meal programmes globally; the social consequences for human capital development; and then the extraordinary efforts of countries to reopen schools, rebuild systems (including school meals) and not only re-establish but expand their school meal programmes.

In this edition of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide*, we explore the status of school meal programmes two years on, using the latest available data, as countries have had the opportunity to reflect on past experiences and make decisions on their school meal programmes. The combination of the latest data, case studies, research and evidence presented in this edition clearly points to a shift in how countries perceive school meals, not only as the world's largest and most effective safety net which governments rely on during crises, but as a major contributor to national development to help address society-wide problems.

Overall progress has surpassed expectations: the latest data reveal that approximately 466 million children are now receiving school meals around the globe. Over the last four years, this amounts to an increase of almost 80 million children, or a 20 percent expansion. These figures highlight the unprecedented success of the school meals agenda in the policy and international development space, comparable to the successes of global vaccination campaigns.

This positive trend ensued despite the mixed results in the previous report, which highlighted that low-income countries had been unable to fully restore their school meal programmes to pre-COVID-19 levels and were lagging behind. The latest data show that, over the last two years, the highest improvements were made where needs are greatest, with low-income countries increasing their school meals coverage by nearly 60 percent.

This publication tells a global success story that spans countries across different income levels and regions, with new countries adopting national school meal programmes, including Canada, Indonesia and Ukraine. Among the countries taking significant steps towards national school meal programmes is Denmark, which has committed to establishing a National Pilot Scheme for school meals, aimed at putting in place a knowledge and experience base to inform the future national programme. In terms of rapid recent expansion, the African continent is the biggest success story with 20 million additional children receiving school meals over the last two years. Notable continental champions include Benin, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar and Rwanda with 1.5 to 6-fold expansions of their school meal programmes in just two years. Not all of the success is visible in terms of numbers; for example, most high and upper-middle-income countries have stable, elevated levels of school meals coverage and are focusing instead on efficiency and quality.

The explanation for this global success story is significantly linked to the unprecedented mobilization of countries through new multilateral mechanisms, most notably the School Meals Coalition and the Global Alliance Against Hunger. These global movements are inspired and led by governments and signal a clear shift in global dialogue around school meals from donor-led, externally funded programmes to a domestically prioritized policy.



A girl in South Sudan smiles in her classroom.
WFP/Samantha Reinders

The strong momentum and demand for this reinvented multilateralism is seen through the rapid expansion of the School Meals Coalition. Since its creation in 2021, the Coalition now unites 108 countries in various stages of national development, 144 partners and six regional bodies. The School Meals Coalition and its initiatives have cemented the role of school meals as a global public policy instrument that may be one of the best solutions to some of the world's most intractable, society-wide problems. Across various country contexts, school meal programmes are now recognized as a mainstream government policy, providing governments with public policy levers across multiple sectors, including education, health, local economies and food systems.

However, much remains to be done as stark differences remain across the globe. In low-income countries, school meals coverage at primary school level is estimated to be as low as 27 percent compared to 80 percent in high-income countries. Low-income countries also continue to significantly depend on foreign aid for their school meal programmes. The international development community answered the call for action made in the previous edition of this publication and increased Official Development Assistance for school meals by approximately 20 percent. However, in absolute terms, Official Development Assistance only represents about 1 percent of global investment in school meals, which means that – except for in low-income countries and fragile contexts – school meals are broadly protected from the uncertainties and variations of external aid.

At the time of the writing of this report, the international development community is going through a paradigm shift and Official Development Assistance is projected to decline sharply. It is important to recognize both the risks that these changes pose and the potential opportunities of doing development better. The new call for action to the development community is to focus dwindling resources where they are most needed to protect recent gains; and adapt to the rapidly evolving multilateral mechanisms and new ways of collaboration, including by offering systematic and holistic guidance, rigorous research and technical assistance.

Main findings

The School Meals Coalition has emerged as a unique, multilateral mechanism for collaboration, innovation and learning, contributing to the mainstreaming of school meals in the global policy agenda. The School Meals Coalition, and other multilateral mechanisms, mark a significant shift that has stimulated global action, reflected in the recent, unprecedented expansion of school meals.

The School Meals Coalition is a rapidly expanding collaborative network that now includes 108 member governments, 144 partner organizations and six regional bodies united to ensure that all children have access to healthy, nutritious meals in school by 2030. Since the creation of the School Meals Coalition in 2021, the rapid expansion of school meals worldwide has accelerated to levels comparable to the biggest recent success stories in development (global vaccination campaigns, improvements in school enrolment). Overall, nearly 80 million additional children have received school meals since the 2020 *State of School Feeding Worldwide* report, equivalent to a 20 percent increase. Of the 48 million additional children receiving school meals since the last edition in 2022, 32 million children are from Coalition countries. To date, over 50 countries have submitted ambitious commitments to scale and improve their school meal programmes in line with the Coalition's objectives. Through this active membership, countries are contributing to a global dialogue and recognizing the School Meals Coalition as an effective forum for exchange and learning.

The latest global estimate that approximately 466 million children are now receiving school meals globally marks success stories at all income levels, with the highest improvements observed where needs are greatest.

Data from 174 countries indicate that approximately 466 million children at pre-primary, primary and secondary school levels are now reached by school meal programmes. Part of the increase may be attributable to improvements in data quality. Further analysis indicates significant differences by income levels and geographies. Low-income countries with the lowest school meals coverage show the largest scale up of almost 60 percent over the last two years. In terms of regions, Africa has made the most progress, accounting for approximately 20 million of the additional children covered by school meal programmes since the last report.

A new wave of countries has adopted national school meal programmes across all income levels. In high and upper-middle-income countries, where coverage is already relatively high, efforts have focused on strengthening the efficiency and institutionalization of existing programmes, including through the adoption and/or strengthening of national school meals policies and legal frameworks.

Investment in school meals has increased significantly with the new global estimate of US$84 billion representing an approximate US$36 billion expansion since the last estimate, with 99 percent of this increase coming from domestic budgets.

Nearly all of the estimated increase in investment in school meals is attributable to domestic financing, which continues to represent the largest source of funding for school meals globally. While international donor funding has also grown by over 20 percent, particularly for low and lower-middle-income countries, this represents only a modest increase in overall value from US$364 million to US$445 million when compared to the scale of government contributions. This overall low reliance on external financing indicates that, globally, school meals are not susceptible to the uncertainties and variations of international development investment. However, caution is needed to ensure that the countries which are most dependent on external funding and face capacity and fragility constraints can continue expanding school meals and are supported in their gradual transition to national ownership.

Across all regions and income levels countries have focused on strengthening the quality of school meals through the institutionalization and adoption of policies and legal frameworks.

Globally, 107 countries reported having a school meals policy in place, with lower-middle-income countries showing the greatest increase since the previous edition of this publication. Similarly, school meals are typically combined with other complementary activities and policy interventions to meet the needs of learners, depending on the context. Overall, only 8 percent of countries reported having no complementary programme in place; 23 percent of countries had one to three complementary programmes; and approximately 69 percent reported four or more complementary activities provided with school meals. More detailed and granular efforts to reach different policy objectives through school meal programmes are evidenced through School Meals Coalition commitments.

Expanded research shows that multiple sectors benefit from school meal programmes, and that the aggregated benefits across sectors make school meals an exceptionally cost-effective investment in national development.

Emerging evidence from the most recent value-for-money studies, based on the additive benefits across several sectors (including health and nutrition, education, social protection, agriculture and local economies), show the positive cost–benefits of investment in school meal programmes across all studies at both national and subnational levels up to US$30 for each dollar spent, with most benefits ranging from US$3 to US$9.

In addition to well established evidence on the positive impact of school meals on schooling outcomes, a systematic review of available trials on the impacts of school meals on learning shows that in terms of impact and cost–benefits, school meals rank higher than some other popular education interventions such as teacher training, additional textbooks or class size. Latest systematic reviews confirm the significant, positive impact of school meals on food security, dietary diversity and mental well-being; and build on the evidence base showing positive impacts on local agriculture and economic opportunities for farmers and local supply-chain actors. Latest data also confirm that school meals are significant contributors to direct job creation in the range of 1,000–2,000 direct jobs per 100,000 schoolchildren receiving school meals.



Local farmers grow fruits and vegetables in Cuba.
WFP/Irshad Khan

The School Meals Coalition and its initiatives have continued to attract global expertise and knowledge-sharing, leading to new findings and innovation reflected in government commitments.

The Coalition's four initiatives have continued to expand in reach and to progress towards their respective objectives.

- The Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition continued its work through six communities of practice. The Research Consortium has co-created a Global Academy of around 1,200 academics and practitioners from approximately 330 organizations across 110 countries. To date, the Global Academy has hosted more than 40 virtual events for over 4,000 experts. More than half of the Coalition's member countries have developed case studies of their national school meal programmes to help identify and share good practice.

- The Sustainable Financing Initiative has focused on unlocking new funding pathways to ensure the sustainability of school meal programmes. Since completion of the Rwanda finance strategy, demand for such practical research has grown rapidly with ten additional country financing strategies currently under way, including for Ghana and Sierra Leone.

- The Data and Monitoring Initiative established multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms, including an indicator working group to review over 250 existing indicators on school meals; developed the methodology for a school meals indicator for the UNESCO Quality Education Framework; and launched a first iteration of the School Meals Coalition's database.

- Since its launch, the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative has for the first time collected data on the role and importance of subnational entities in school meal programming and delivery, while the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact has mobilized more than 300 cities to learn from each other.

The commitments made by School Meals Coalition member countries range significantly in scope, dependent on the different levels of maturity of their school meal programmes. For example:

- **Brazil:** Committed to further increasing family farmers' participation in the National School Feeding Programme by raising the minimum percentage of financial resources allocated to family farming purchases in the national programme above the current 30 percent quota.
- **France:** Committed to expanding access to school meals for all children by establishing US$50 million in aid for school canteens in rural municipalities.
- **Kenya:** Committed to scaling up its national school meal programme to achieve universal coverage by 2030, expanding its coverage from 2.3 million children receiving school meals in 2022 to 10 million children by 2030. This expansion is planned to be undertaken in a planet-friendly way, which promotes smallholder farmers' economic inclusion.
- **Ethiopia:** Plans to invest US$110 million in 2025. The government budget for school meals increased from US$45 million in 2022 to US$84 million in 2024.
- **Burundi:** Through the Finance Act, committed to gradually increase the annual national budget dedicated to school meals to reach 50 percent coverage in 2027 and 100 percent by 2032. Burundi has more than tripled its investment since 2022, now allocating US$9.5 million to its school meal programme.
- **Rwanda:** Committed to sustaining the annual budget allocated to the national school meal programme. The budget increased from US$25 million in 2021 to US$72 million in 2024.
- **Ukraine:** Hosted the European Regional School Meals Summit in 2024, showcasing Ukraine's leadership in advancing school meals and children's well-being. The same year, Ukraine introduced free meals for all children in grades 1–4 and plans to extend free meals to all schoolchildren by 2025.
- **Indonesia:** Launched the Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (Free Nutritious Meal Programme) in January 2025, aiming to reach 78 million schoolchildren by 2029.

This report introduces a new conceptual and operational framework on the relationship between school meals and food systems to respond to increasing demand from governments.

The special report presents a new conceptual framework on the relationship between school meals and the food systems that supply them. The framework shows how the public procurement of food to supply national school meal programmes has the potential to significantly contribute to global efforts to address some of the world's greatest environmental challenges. This framework is the result of two years of analysis and represents the joint work of 164 authors from 85 different organizations worldwide, representing the topic's extraordinary importance and range of influence.

School meals are increasingly recognized as a key investment for governments to provide a platform for food system transformation. The key challenge is how to move towards healthier diets with lower environmental impact, while also enhancing the local and national economy, including farmer incomes.

The conceptual and operational framework in the special chapter introduces changes in two sets of policies: (i) those directed at making immediate changes to school meal programmes in four key areas: menus, energy for cooking, waste and education about food; and (ii) demand-driven, planet-friendly procurement policies that promote agroecological farming practices and develop sustainable food systems.

WFP continues to adapt its leadership role in school meal programming by responding to the thriving global ecosystem that it helped to create.

As the lead UN agency in school meals, WFP continues to play multiple roles in advancing the school meals agenda worldwide. Since helping to launch the School Meals Coalition in 2021, WFP has strategically shifted focus towards global advocacy, national ownership and systems transformation through technical assistance, in partnership with other stakeholders, while continuing to deliver multisectoral integrated programmes in emergencies and fragile contexts.

WFP's role as the secretariat of the School Meals Coalition is emblematic of this shift and enhanced role in advancing school meals at the global level, fostering collaborative networks and facilitating partnerships, research and advocacy. In addition, the School Meals Coalition's Data and Monitoring Initiative, hosted by WFP, is working with governments and partners to enhance the global data architecture for school meals. The Data and Monitoring Initiative will continue producing the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* on a biennial basis and maintain and improve the Global School Meals Database to ensure that all governments and partners have access to quality school meals data and the latest evidence and research.

A further shift and recalibration within WFP's operational portfolio manifests in a renewed commitment to the institutionalization of school meal programmes at all income levels and support to national programmes delivered through local systems and institutions. Since 2020, an additional 31 million children have received school meals in 78 countries supported by WFP, primarily through the expansion of government owned and funded programmes, while WFP provided policy support and technical assistance. As well as WFP's focus on increasing the reach of national school meal programmes, WFP supports their quality and efficiency, including through diversification and localization of nutritious food commodities and nutritional enhancements, such as fortification.

In terms of direct delivery of school meals, WFP has accelerated the transition of programmes in middle-income countries to full government ownership, while continuing to prioritize fragile and low-income settings with significant security and capacity constraints. In 2023, 15 million of the 21 million children directly supported by WFP were in such vulnerable areas. As development and humanitarian funding is shrinking and food insecurity continues to rise with risks of new and deepened crises and disruptions, including in trade and global supply chains, the provision of school meals in the most fragile contexts to safeguard children's education, nutrition and well-being will be vital. WFP will continue prioritizing children in the most vulnerable settings. At the same time, as governments recognize school meals as an efficient safety net during crises, multisectoral collaboration – including governments, communities and international partners – will be critical in expanding and sustaining these programmes. Such programmes also aim to have the capacity to respond flexibly through scalable systems, contingency financing and adaptive delivery models.

Priorities for action

1. Continue to expand school meals coverage and improve the quality of meals served.
2. Enhance existing networks and partnerships, and deploy expertise to support national and subnational efforts to find context-specific solutions to improve school meal programmes.
3. Expand membership of the School Meals Coalition as a means to accelerate government action, enable learning and enhance the availability of evidence to inform policy and programming.
4. Unleash the power of school meal programmes as a key enabler for food system transformation and a strategy for investment in the economic prosperity and human capital of the next generation.
5. Prepare for future crises and supply chain disruptions, and protect the most vulnerable through school meals as the world's most extensive safety net.

State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024

This publication is part of a series of reports by WFP, as announced in the 2020 strategy - *A Chance for Every Schoolchild* - to help ensure that an up-to-date knowledge base is available on school meal programmes. The publication's findings are presented in the following four chapters, with a Special Report at the end of the publication:
Chapter 1 - School meal programmes in 2024: scale, coverage and trends
Chapter 2 - The School Meals Coalition – a global movement for school meals
Chapter 3 - New advances in understanding school meals: innovation and sustainable programming
Chapter 4 - The global and strategic role of WFP in school health and nutrition
Special Report - A new conceptual and operational framework for school meals and food systems: rethinking the implications of national school meal programmes for climate, environment, biodiversity and food sovereignty

For this publication, additional material will be available in the online version on WFP's website. Each chapter will be available as a stand-alone report with additional content. The reader will also be able to extract country case studies and reports on cross-cutting themes.

Introduction



A girl studies in school in Nepal.
WFP/Samantha Reinders

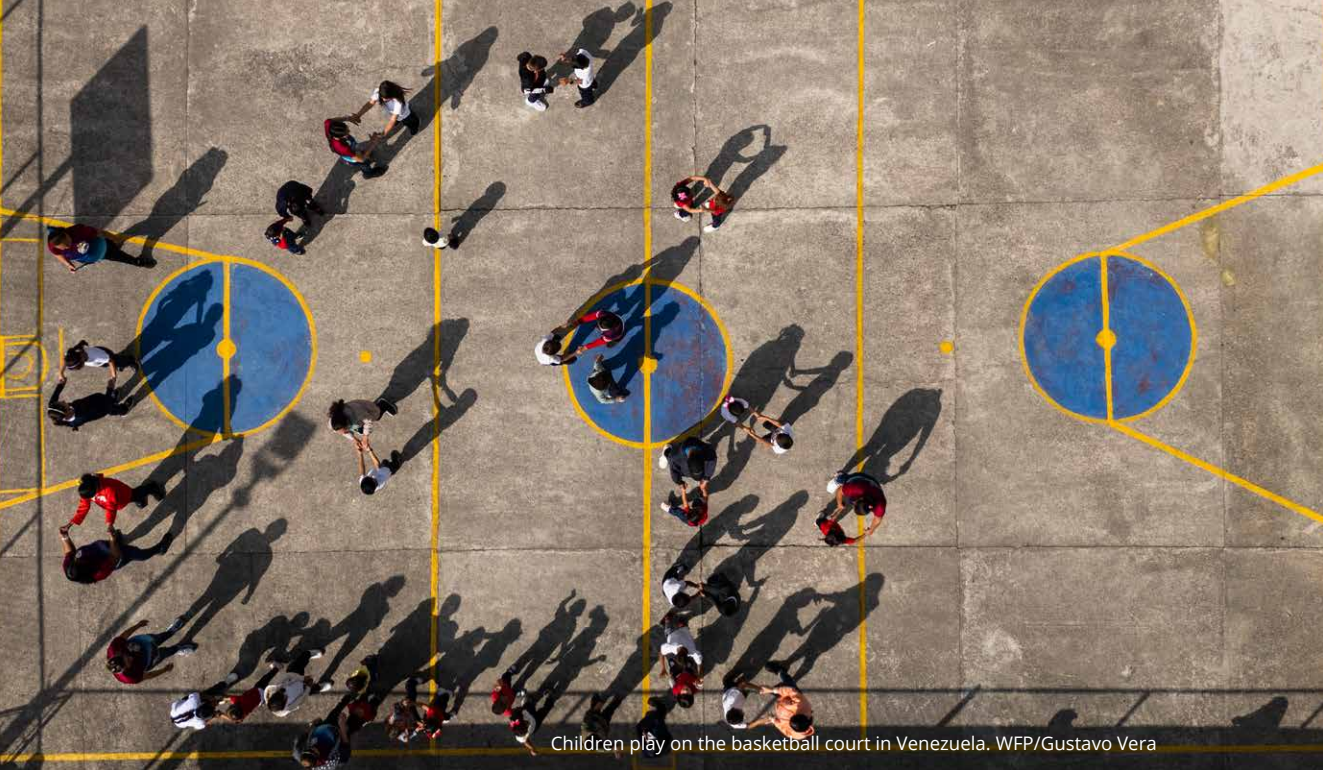
Introduction

This is the official publication of the United Nations World Food Programme on the *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024*.

When the previous report was published in 2023, schools had reopened after unprecedented closures during the COVID-19 pandemic that led to a learning crisis and removal of a critical safety net in school meals. The global figures in 2022 on the number of children receiving school meals told a positive story of global coverage rebounding and exceeding pre-COVID levels. However, the speed of recovery was uneven and low-income countries were lagging significantly behind. At the same time, governments increasingly recognized both the need for a new approach to support schoolchildren and the significance of school meals as a programme contributing to multiple critical objectives. The 2022 report (WFP, 2022) announced the creation of the School Meals Coalition in 2021, its rapid transformation into a truly global movement and its initial contributions to the school meals agenda.

Two years later, we have moved past the focus on recovery and there is a new global momentum driving support for school meal programmes. School meal programmes have expanded beyond all expectations and are now reaching a new historic milestone of 466 million children globally. Several countries are only now announcing and starting a rapid scale-up of their programmes, which gives us hope for the future. Four years since the creation of the School Meals Coalition, the true transformative potential of the initiative is apparent. In addition to the actions of Coalition members, this edition of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* marks a clear shift in the global perception of school meals from a donor-driven priority to a nationally owned, powerful policy lever across all income levels and country contexts.

State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024 explores the global status of school meal programmes, as governments and their partners, including WFP and civil society, continue investing in this powerful policy for national development. The 2024 publication also takes stock of the commitments and actions of the School Meals Coalition and how this complex partnership network is making a global impact for children and societies around the world.



Children play on the basketball court in Venezuela. WFP/Gustavo Vera

The role of the State of School Feeding Worldwide as the global barometer of school meals

A periodic report on the most current data on the global status of school meal programmes is an essential tool that provides policymakers and the public with an understanding of key global figures and trends. It also outlines the evolution in the understanding of school meals as a powerful policy lever for national development. In 2013, for the first time ever, WFP published a global report on school meal programmes, which still serves as the global baseline. Since 2020, the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* publication has become WFP's flagship biennial publication. With the 2024 edition (the fourth in the series), WFP honours its commitment to regular reporting on the evolution of school meal programmes around the globe.

Each subsequent report will continue to follow a similar format and structure, and use the best available and most recent data sources to describe the scale and coverage of school meal programmes. The series is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of all advances in school meals, but rather the reports will provide updates and a summary of advances in research and practice. This is not a report of WFP activities in school meals, but an overview of all work on school meals worldwide, focused on the achievements of national and subnational actors and the support of all partners and stakeholders.

Looking back at schools and food

School meals have a rich history: even the earliest schools would have had to consider how children might be fed during the school day. Modern thinking on school-based health and nutrition goes beyond that simple concept and recognizes school meals as having specific, broader benefits for children and their communities. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were geographically targeted attempts to address social protection, such as the 1907 act in the United Kingdom that sought to deliver food through schools in some of the poorest communities. By the 1940s, this approach had been expanded to include universal national programmes, such as in Finland and Sweden, and was often combined with a vision of school meals as a stimulus for agricultural production, as in the United States of America.

School meals are increasingly viewed as a human right: India has led the way in declaring meals at school a legal obligation of those providing education; Brazil and Mexico have incorporated school meals into social safety nets and community development; and Nelson Mandela's first 100 days of planning in South Africa viewed school meals for the poor as key to address lost opportunities and to invest in the next generation.

In 2009, the World Bank and WFP, in collaboration with the Partnership for Child Development, published an analysis called *Rethinking School Feeding* (Bundy et al., 2009). The analysis was sparked by the food, fuel and financial crises of 2008, during which governments recognized that school meal programmes offered multiple benefits to the most vulnerable, e.g. in-kind income support to families; learning and access to education; and maintaining health and well-being. As a result, governments increasingly viewed school meals as an attractive, long-term social protection investment, as well as a short-term safety net. There were calls for greater rigour in the analysis of policy issues and of the scale and quality of evaluations and trial design (Alderman & Bundy, 2011; Kristjansson et al., 2007). It became clear that governments invest in school meals not because they deliver on one goal, but because they deliver on many.

A history of school meal publications

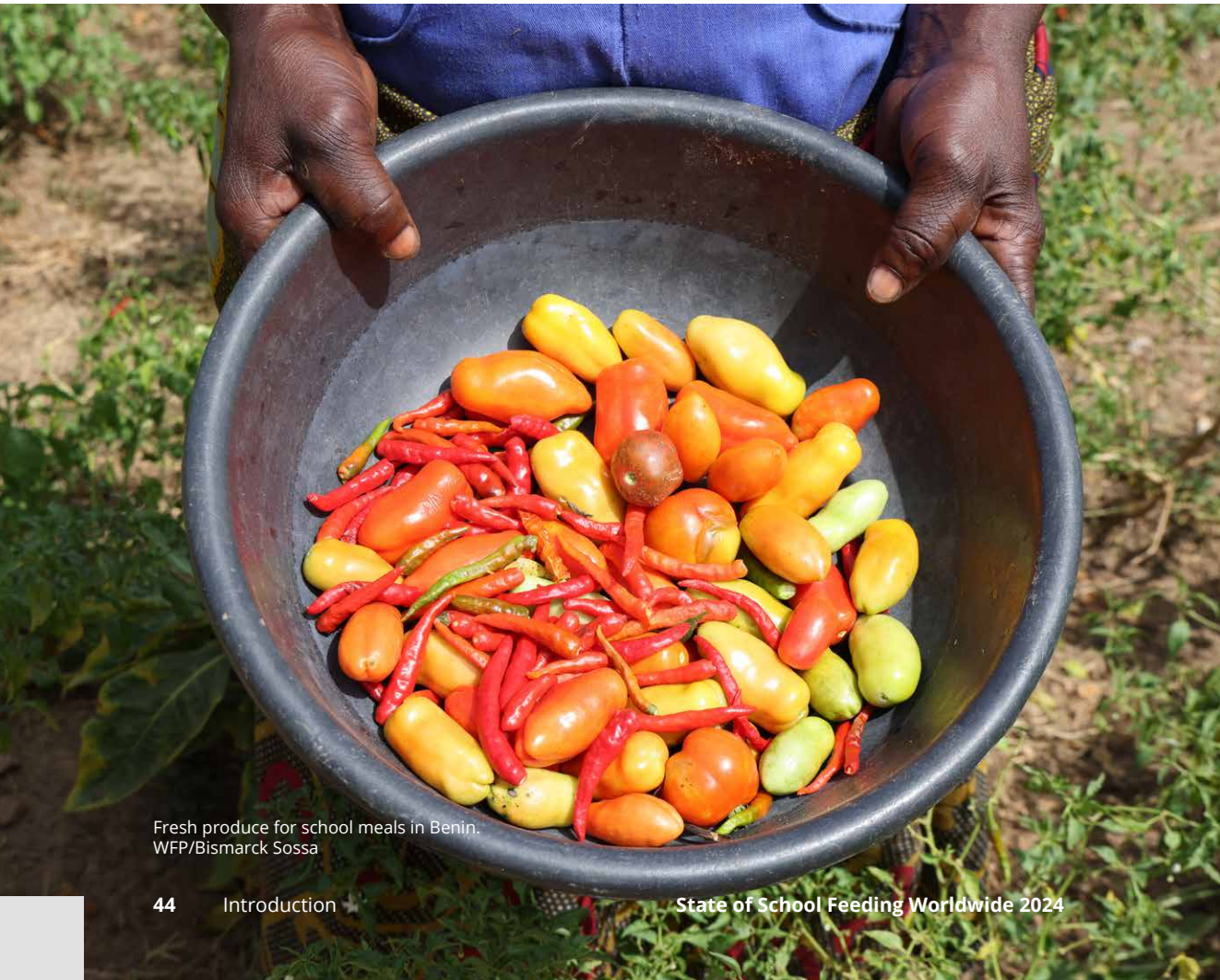
Over the last decade, there has been a sustained improvement in the quality and quantity of school meal programmes delivered by governments and development partners, and a concomitant increase in the quantity and quality of research. The analysis contained within the first *State of School Feeding Worldwide* (WFP, 2013, 2020b) was a key part of this renaissance of interest, as was the School Feeding Sourcebook's in-depth analysis of national programmes in 14 countries (Drake et al., 2016). The Partnership for Child Development, with assistance from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (among others), has supported new randomized trials of school meals, which have become seminal to the understanding of programmes in stable situations, for example, the national school meal programme in Ghana (Gelli et al., 2019) and internally displaced persons camps in Uganda (Adelman et al., 2019); and in emergency situations, such as when the national school meal programme was interrupted by a coup in Mali (Aurino et al., 2018). In 2017, the third edition of the World Bank's Disease Control Priorities (Jamison et al., 2017) included a detailed analysis of the benefits and costs of school health and nutrition programmes and further clarified the case for school-based health and nutrition programmes as an investment in human capital.

This evolution has mirrored WFP's approach to school meals. WFP adopted its first Global School Feeding Policy in 2009, recognizing that school meals are essential to household food security and serve as an effective safety net for vulnerable households. The policy was updated in 2013 to further leverage school meals as a multisectoral intervention benefiting education, health and nutrition, social protection and local agriculture, with a particular focus on technical assistance to governments and the strengthening of government-led, national school meal programmes.

In 2020, WFP adopted a new School Feeding Strategy, signalling a renewed commitment to lead global efforts. The ten-year strategy reinforced the 8,000 days paradigm, (WFP, 2022); strengthened the approach to transitioning school meal programmes to national ownership; and emphasized the critical link between school meals and sustainable food systems.

The updated 2024 School Meals Policy reinforced WFP's role as a convener within the global school meals ecosystem, fostering partnerships across fragile and stable contexts, while emphasizing WFP's commitment to supporting schoolchildren in fragile and emergency situations.

This publication is part of a concerted effort to strengthen the knowledge and evidence base on school meals.



Fresh produce for school meals in Benin.
WFP/Bismarck Sossa

The structure of this publication

This publication comprises four chapters and a Special Report covering the following topics:

- **Chapter 1. School meal programmes in 2024: scale, coverage and trends** provides an updated overview of the status of school meal programmes globally, with a larger sample of countries; more data from official sources and surveys and a new snapshot of subnational data on school meals at the municipal level.

- **Chapter 2. The School Meals Coalition – a global movement for school meals** details the Coalition's new collaborative model and the accelerated progress made by governments, initiatives and partners towards their shared goals.

- **Chapter 3. New advances in understanding school meals: innovations and sustainable programming** is a summary of the latest evidence and research on school meal programmes, including updates on the multisectoral benefits and returns on investment, new programming practices and innovative financing for school meals.

- **Chapter 4. The global and strategic role of WFP in school health and nutrition** captures WFP's continued commitment to school meals through its role as the secretariat of the School Meals Coalition, an established partner in technical assistance and a key player in providing operational support.

- **Special Report. A new conceptual and operational framework for school meals and food systems: rethinking the implications of national school meal programmes for climate, environment, biodiversity and food sovereignty** describes a framework for linking school meals and the food systems that supply them, illustrating the role of demand-driven policies and the power of procurement in food system transformation.

The publication also contains country and regional case studies from around the world, and boxes to highlight some key sectoral and thematic issues. Going beyond the global overview, these contributions provide a deeper dive into the unique experiences, challenges and lessons learned by countries, policymakers, partners and technical experts on school meals.

The boxes and case studies feature:

- Progress and achievements of school meal programmes in over 15 countries from all regions and income levels, illustrating the diversity of experience and practice.
- Policy, programmatic tools and innovations for improving the quality and sustainability of school meal programmes alongside their multisectoral benefits.
- Global and regional efforts and events contributing to the momentum behind school meals.

Terminology

Terminology presents special challenges when writing about school meal programmes and their impact on multiple sectors. School feeding, school meals and school-based programmes are all terms that continue to be used globally. The most commonly utilized term is now converging to "school meals" or "school meal programmes". However, depending on country context, name and longevity of existing programmes, and what other complementary activities may be delivered, different terms continue to be used.

While this is a challenge that was highlighted in previous editions of this publication, the link to food system transformation presents new challenges. The extensive number of organizations and academics investing in research around food systems has led to an expansion of the terminology used. The same terms, such as regenerative agriculture, or even local procurement, can be understood or interpreted very differently in different contexts. This edition tries to balance the breadth of emerging thinking and research with clear terminology. However, more work will be needed to harmonize terminology.

WFP welcomes feedback on this publication. Correspondence can be addressed to *wfp.publications@wfp.org* or to the World Food Programme, Via C.G. Viola, 68-70, 00148 Rome, Italy.

Chapter 1
School meal programmes in 2024: scale, coverage and trends



A boy eats his school lunch in Ukraine.
WFP/Anastasiia Honcharuk

This first chapter, together with Annexes II and III at the end of the publication, provides an overview of the current status of school meal programmes worldwide based on data from 176 countries and states. Annex III provides detailed data and sources by country and state.[1] It shows the progress made towards the School Meals Coalition's goal of reaching all children with nutritious school meals. The data and insights contained in this chapter build on the methodology and analysis used in the *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020* and *2022* (WFP, 2020b, 2022) and are intended to provide readers with a current assessment of key global metrics on school meals, including the proportion of students receiving school meals, the reach of national initiatives, and the scale of national (domestic) and international investment.

The data provided here represent the most up-to-date information on school meals. Compared to previous publications, there are more data from official sources and surveys and fewer estimations.

The 2024 report is a further step in gaining an understanding of the trajectory of school meal programmes worldwide and benefits from data sets in the preceding 2020 and 2022 reports. A more complete explanation of data collection and estimations is provided in Annex II.

In 2013, WFP published the first report in this series (WFP, 2013). It was the first truly global effort to describe school meal programmes worldwide and provided a valuable and unique baseline reference. However, methodologies have evolved and improved since then. Therefore, the main analysis for this publication focuses on changes since 2020.

[1] Data for at least one key school meals indicator is available for a total of 176 countries. For each specific indicator the country total will vary.

Since the creation of the School Meals Coalition in 2021, the data indicate a sizeable increase in the number of children covered by school meal programmes around the globe. Current evidence indicates that approximately 466 million children at pre-primary, primary and secondary school levels are now reached by school meal programmes worldwide, an increase of approximately 48 million from the 418 million children reported as receiving school meals in the 2022 publication. The previous two-year increase stood at 30 million from the 388 children reported as receiving school meals in 2020. This is an overall increase of approximately 20 percent in the number of children receiving school meals since the 2020 report. This sustained growth over the last four years, totalling an additional 78 million children, illustrates a large and successful mobilization towards scaling up school meal programmes and governments' clear prioritization of the health and well-being of children.

It is important to note that part of the increase may be attributable to an improvement in data collection and coverage of more countries, and even small changes in some of the largest programmes such as Brazil, China and India may have an impact on global figures.

All regions experienced increases in the number of children covered by school meals or maintained a stable level of coverage. The largest improvements are seen in low-income countries where needs are greatest (a 60 percent increase in the number of children covered since the last report). The African continent, which has the lowest coverage, had the largest scale-up of programmes (an increase of 21.1 million children, or +32 percent since the last report). Other regions with higher coverage, including Latin America and the Caribbean where many countries have achieved universal or near universal coverage, had limited room for further increases. Instead, case studies and qualitative data suggest that the focus in these countries has shifted to improved quality and efficiency.

The estimated global investment in school meals has increased from US$48 billion in 2022 to US$84 billion in 2024. Worldwide, 99 percent of funding for national school meal programmes comes from national budgets. This reaffirms the continuing reality that school meal programmes around the world are operated and funded by national governments.

The latest available data point to a relatively stable share of domestic funding across all income levels, with a slight decrease observed in lower-middle-income countries from 91 to 80 percent.

Additional analysis is needed to better understand whether this apparent decrease is due to data gaps or represents a real decrease in fiscal space for these countries. International support to school meal programmes increased from US$364 million in 2022 to US$445 million in 2024.

Governments continue to show a strong interest in school meals, as evidenced by the rate at which policies and laws governing school meals have been adopted. The proportion of lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income countries implementing specific school meal policies continues to converge with that of high-income countries. However, low-income countries still lag behind in their rate of adoption of policies and laws governing school meals.

This report has re-estimated the number of direct jobs created through school meal programmes, which falls within the same range of estimation as in the 2022 report. Based on the latest data, school meal programmes led to the creation of nearly 2.25 million direct jobs (cooks) in 76 countries, which equates to 1,591 cooks for every 100,000 children receiving school meals. In this edition, the calculation for direct jobs relates to cooks only due to countries' limited reporting on other direct job categories. Based on this latest reported data, the estimated total number of cooks alone required for the 466 million children receiving school meals globally is approximately 7.4 million.

School meal programmes are rarely delivered as isolated interventions but provide the platforms through which important complementary education, nutrition and health activities are delivered. The proportion of national programmes providing complementary interventions in 2022 and 2024 was 80 percent and 92 percent, respectively. This confirms that a majority of countries use an integrated approach to school health to secure the health, nutrition and well-being of children and adolescents.

For the first time since the launch of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* publication, this report provides a snapshot of subnational data on school meals at the municipal level. This addition recognizes the importance of localization and the significant role of municipalities in implementing school meal programmes. Since its creation in 2023, the School Meals Coalition's Cities Feeding the Future Initiative is paving the way for change at the municipal level. Chapter 2 provides a detailed overview of the initiative, Chapter 3 describes its data collection efforts, and this chapter highlights key data points from participating cities. It is envisioned that subnational data will be integrated and featured within the School Meals Coalition's database.

A cook prepares school meals in a refugee camp in Chad.
World Vision/Amy Van Drunen



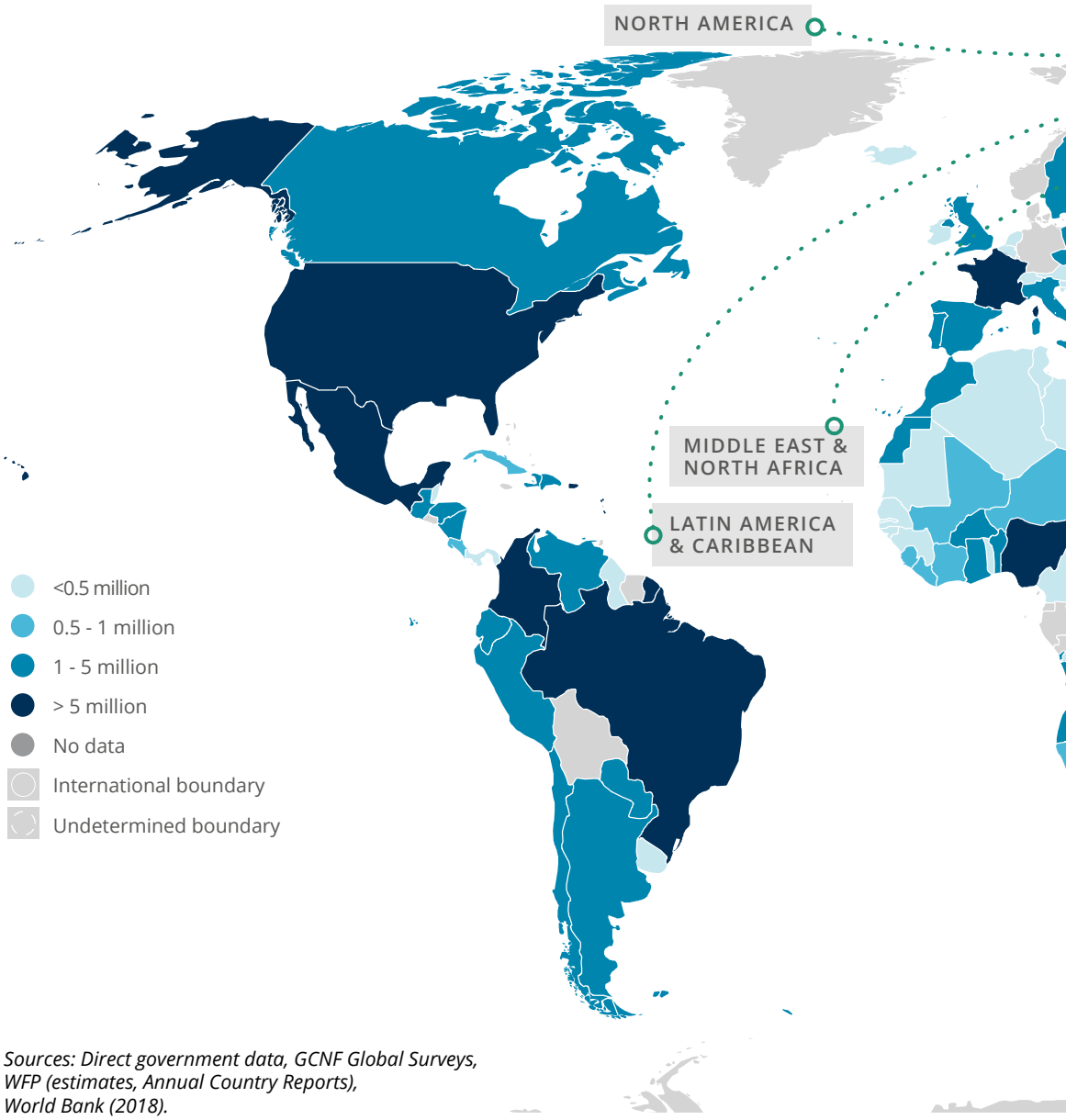
1.1 Number of children receiving school meals

The most recent global data suggest at least 466 million pre-primary, primary and secondary schoolchildren are receiving school meals based on information available from 174 countries.

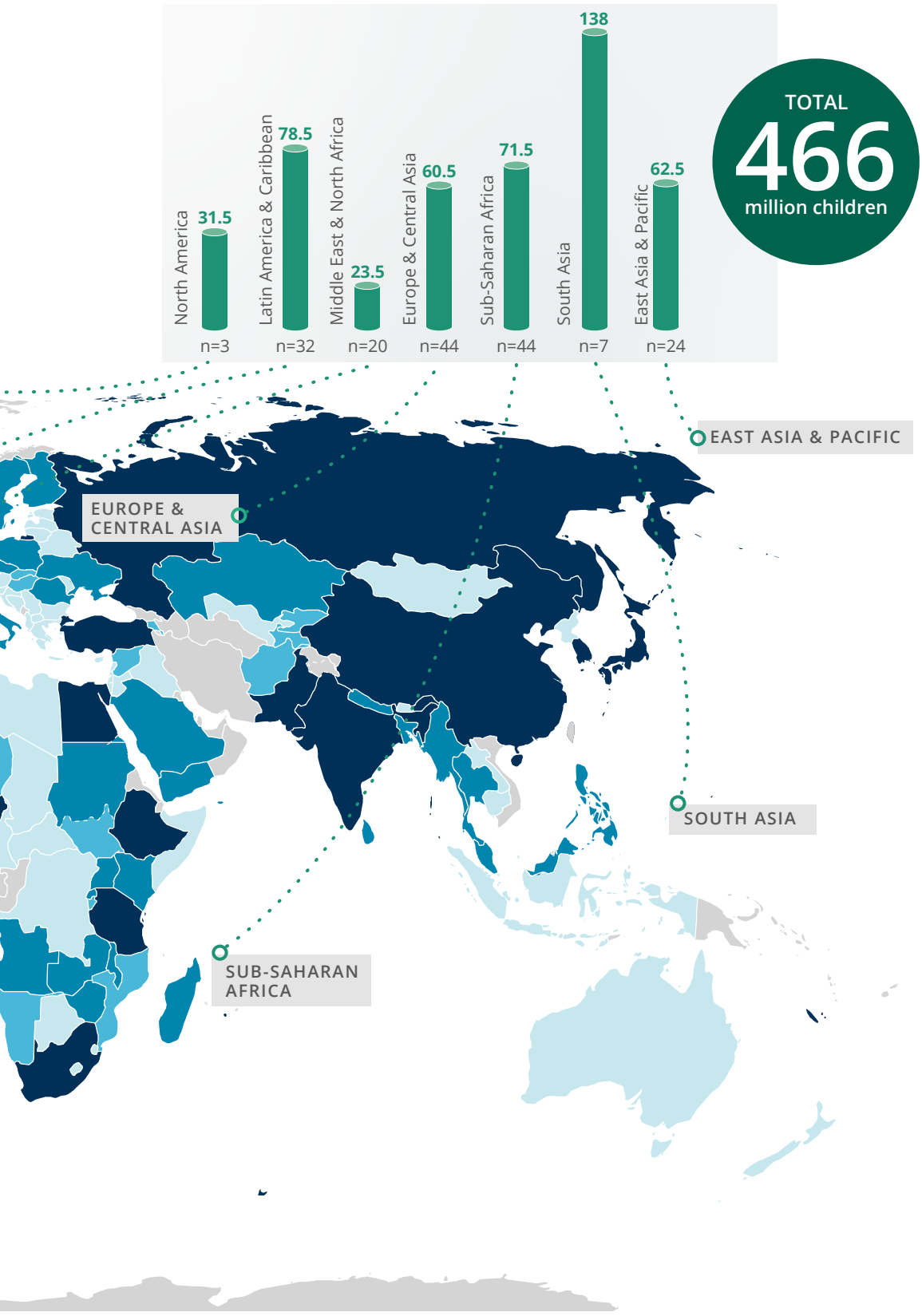
Map 1.1

Children receiving school meals around the world (million)

Approximately 466 million children receive school meals worldwide, an increase of 48 million from the 418 million reported in 2022.



Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys, WFP (estimates, Annual Country Reports), World Bank (2018).


North America
31.5
n=3
Latin America & Caribbean
78.5
n=32
Middle East & North Africa
23.5
n=20
Europe & Central Asia
60.5
n=44
Sub-Saharan Africa
71.5
n=44
South Asia
138
n=7
East Asia & Pacific
62.5
n=24
TOTAL
466
million children
EAST ASIA & PACIFIC
EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA
SOUTH ASIA
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Data sources

For this edition of *State of School Feeding Worldwide*, the data presented were drawn from publicly accessible, official sources including official government statistics, the World Bank, WFP and the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF) Global Survey of School Meal Programs (from all three rounds conducted in 2024, 2021 and 2019,[2] funded by the United States Department of Agriculture [USDA]).

Where there were multiple sources of data for an individual country, the most recent data were used (see Annex III for reference years). Similarly, government statistics were prioritized when available. Of the 176 countries included in this report, 48 countries did not have official government data, nor did they report the number of children receiving school meals through the latest GCNF survey. To fill these gaps, a combination of other sources was used, including previous GCNF surveys, World Bank data published in previous reports, WFP data from Annual Country Reports, WFP estimated data based on data from governments and other partners, and estimated data through a methodology using global averages by income level.

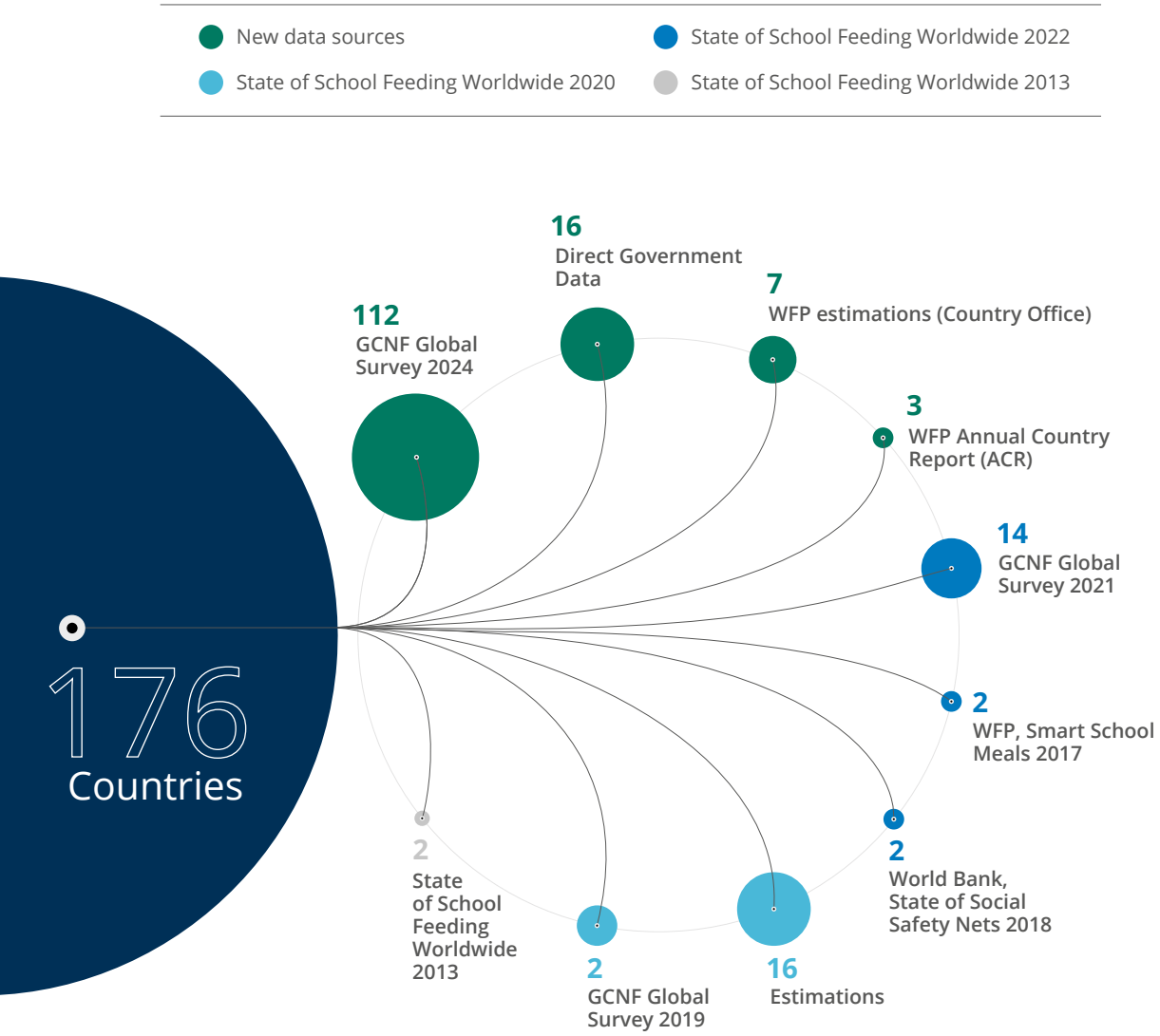
Overall, the 2024 analysis is based on a sample of 176 countries. Compared to the 2022 sample, there is less reliance on estimated data. The number of countries for which estimation methodology had to be used fell from 73 countries in 2020 to 30 in 2022 and 23 in 2024. For the remaining 23 estimates, 16 were retained from the 2020 edition, while for seven countries, it was possible to generate new estimates using available data from WFP country offices and partner organizations. The detailed methodology is described in Annex II.

[2] More information about the survey can be accessed on the website *Global Child Nutrition Foundation | GCNF*.

Figure 1.1

Breakdown of countries by data sources

Approximately 10 percent of the data was sourced from government statistics and around 73 percent from GCNF Global Surveys.



Source: Compiled by the authors using direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys, WFP estimates and Annual Country Reports and World Bank data 2018.

Number of children receiving school meals

The latest available data compiled in this report suggest that approximately 466 million children are receiving school meals around the world (see Map 1.1). This represents an increase of 48 million (approximately 12 percent) from the 418 million children reported in the 2022 edition of this publication (WFP, 2022). Since the establishment of the School Meals Coalition in 2021, this is a remarkable expansion of more than 78 million additional children benefiting from school meal programmes globally, underscoring the global momentum in this area.

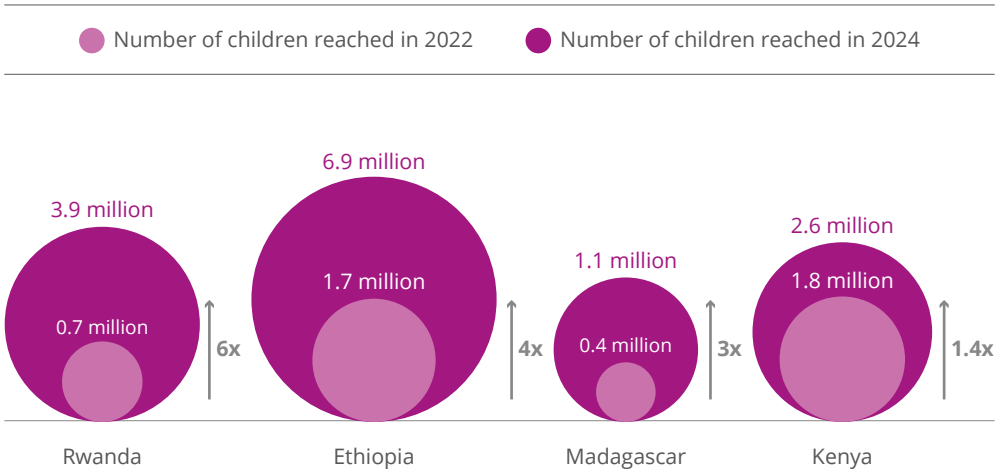
Numerous factors account for the increase in the number of children receiving school meals. A closer look at the data identifies the following trends:

- Of the 48 million additional children receiving school meals, African countries account for approximately 20 million. This includes significant scale-up efforts from countries across the continent (Figure 1.2 presents examples of efforts in African countries).
- Approximately 32 million additional children are receiving school meals in countries that are members of the School Meals Coalition in line with the commitments they made when they joined.
- Some changes are due to variations in the number of children covered in countries with large population sizes, such as Brazil, South Africa and China. Data from Brazil and South Africa is comparable to those included in the 2022 report. While Brazil continues to provide universal coverage for children in public schools, the observed reduction is due to normal variation. In China, there is a continued reduction in the number of children covered by school meal programmes (similar to the previous period) from 40 million in 2020 to 37 million in 2022 and 34.5 million in 2024. The data from China refer specifically to a programme targeting poor and vulnerable children in rural areas and this decrease reflects continued urbanization and households graduating from targeted poverty programmes.
- Reductions in coverage in a few countries are due to the end of temporary scale-ups of supplementary programmes as part of the response to COVID-19. Such examples include Chile, and additional research is needed to understand the variations that arose due to this response.

Figure 1.2

Growth in the number of children receiving school meals in selected African Union countries

Countries in the African Union have significantly scaled up school meal provision, accounting for 20 million of the additional 48 million children reached globally since 2022.



Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys (2021 and 2024).



Girls in a classroom in Haiti.
WFP/Maria Gallar

Change in the number of children receiving school meals since 2022

The change in the scale of school meal programmes between 2022 and 2024 is examined in Figures 1.3 and 1.4 by region and income levels. The comparison does not include South Korea because data is only available for 2024; and India and China are excluded as outliers due to their size in terms of population. Due to lack of recent data, Venezuela no longer has an income classification from the World Bank and is therefore excluded from the income-level analysis (see Annex II).

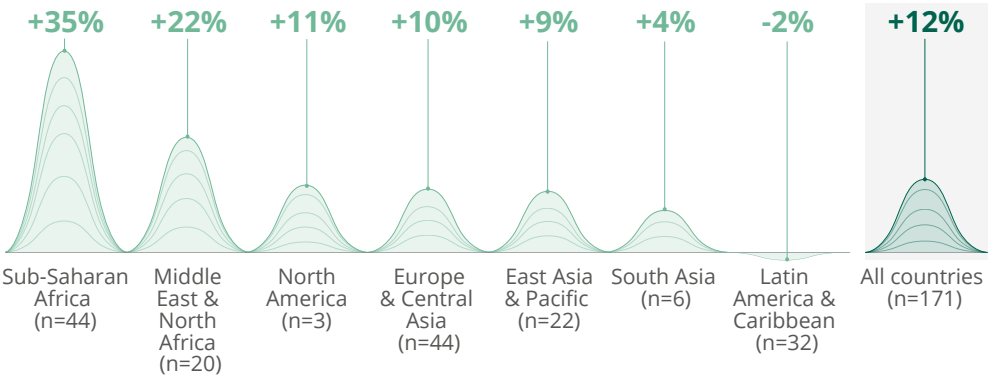
The latest available data suggest that the number of children receiving school meals worldwide has increased by approximately 12 percent since 2022, but this trend is not consistent across regions and income groups. Low-income countries, where needs are greatest, experienced a significant increase in the number of children receiving school meals – close to 60 percent. This is impressive as these countries also have the greatest fiscal space challenges.

The Latin America and Caribbean region had a small decrease in the number of children receiving school meals, which is mainly due to the normal variation in the number of children covered in a few large countries in the region. Therefore, this should be interpreted as "no change" from the previous period. As the region has high coverage of school meal programmes, the stable level of coverage shows that the region has maintained and continued investing in this critical safety net despite challenges and a shrinking fiscal space. A similar explanation can be given for the slight variation in the figures for upper-middle-income countries.

Figure 1.3

Change in the number of children receiving school meals by region between 2022 and 2024

Between 2022 and 2024, the number of children receiving school meals globally increased by 12 percent. The largest increase is in sub-Saharan Africa, reaching nearly 35 percent.[3]

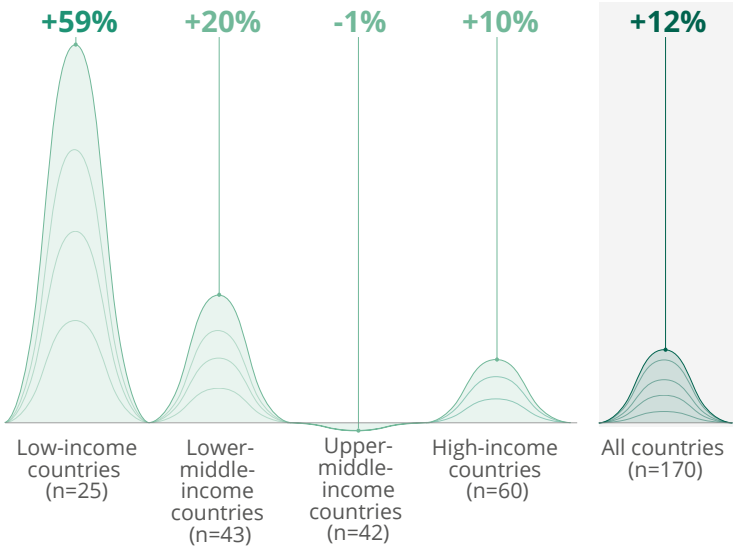


Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys, WFP (estimates, Annual Country Reports), World Bank (2018).

Figure 1.4

Change in the number of children receiving school meals by income level between 2022 and 2024

Between 2022 and 2024, the number of children receiving school meals globally increased by 12 percent. The largest increase is in low-income countries, reaching nearly 60 percent.[4]



Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys, WFP (estimates, Annual Country Reports), World Bank (2018).

[3] India and China excluded from the analysis.

[4] China and India are excluded from the analysis. Venezuela does not have income classification.

1.2 Coverage of school meal programmes

Consistent with the 2022 edition of *State of School Feeding Worldwide*, coverage is defined in this report as the proportion of school-enrolled children who benefit from a school meal programme. While the school meals data presented in Section 1.1 cover pre-primary, primary and secondary education, the analysis of coverage data is limited to primary schoolchildren only, due to the lower availability of consistent data for the other two school levels.

To improve the quality of coverage estimations since the 2022 report, UNESCO's Institute of Statistics data are used for the denominator (number of children enrolled in primary school – see Figure 1.5). This is consistent with the proposed methodology for the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 indicator (see Box 1.1). The change in methodology introduced in the 2022 report and increased precision have had the effect of reducing apparent coverage in all estimates compared to the 2020 publication. This report's estimates use the same methodology as the 2022 report, while capping coverage at 100 percent at the upper limit.[5]

[5] Coverage estimates are only calculated for countries where both the number of children receiving school meals (numerator) and total enrolment at the primary level (denominator) are available. In cases where enrolment data for the same reference year were not available, estimates were calculated using enrolment figures from up to one year prior to the reference period of the school meals data. Countries for which this adjustment was applied are marked with an asterisk in annex III.

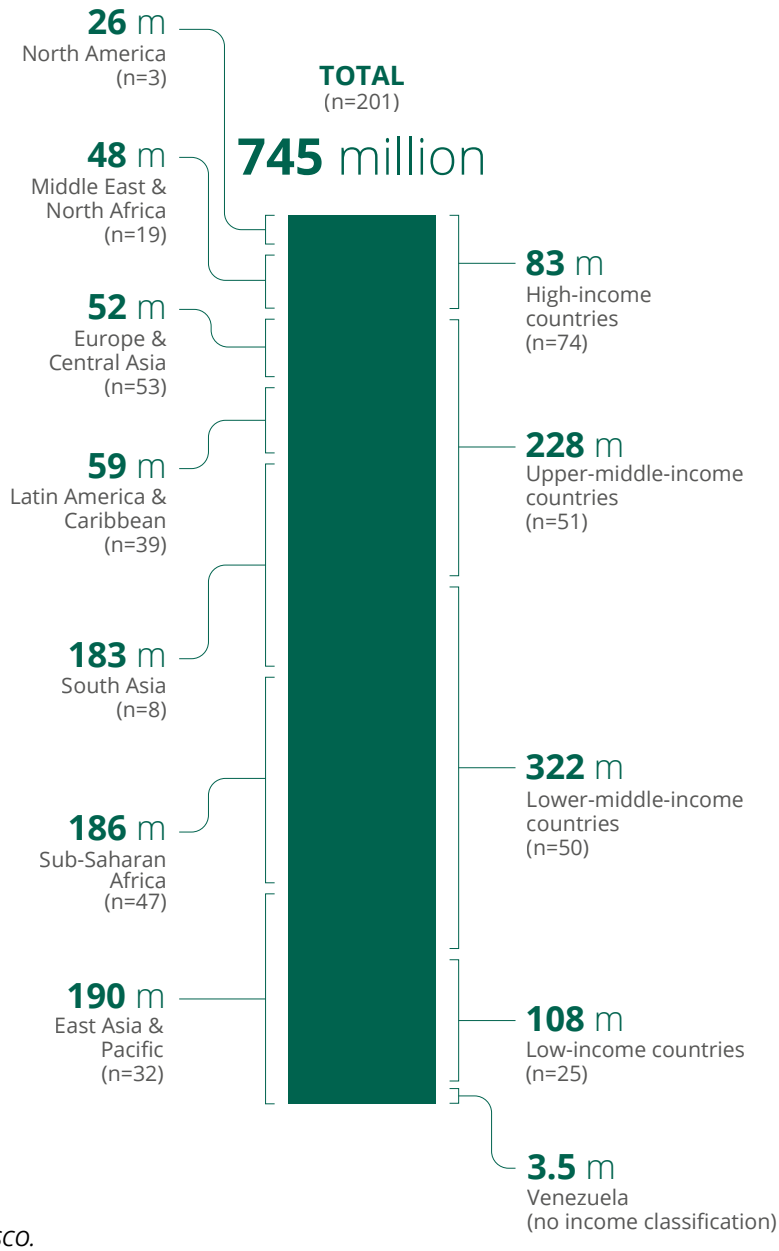


A Nepalese girl completes homework after school.
WFP/Samantha Reinders

Figure 1.5

Children enrolled in primary schools around the world

745 million children are enrolled in primary schools globally, of which 108 million are in low-income countries; 322 million in lower-middle-income countries; 228 million in upper-middle-income countries; and 83 million in high-income countries.

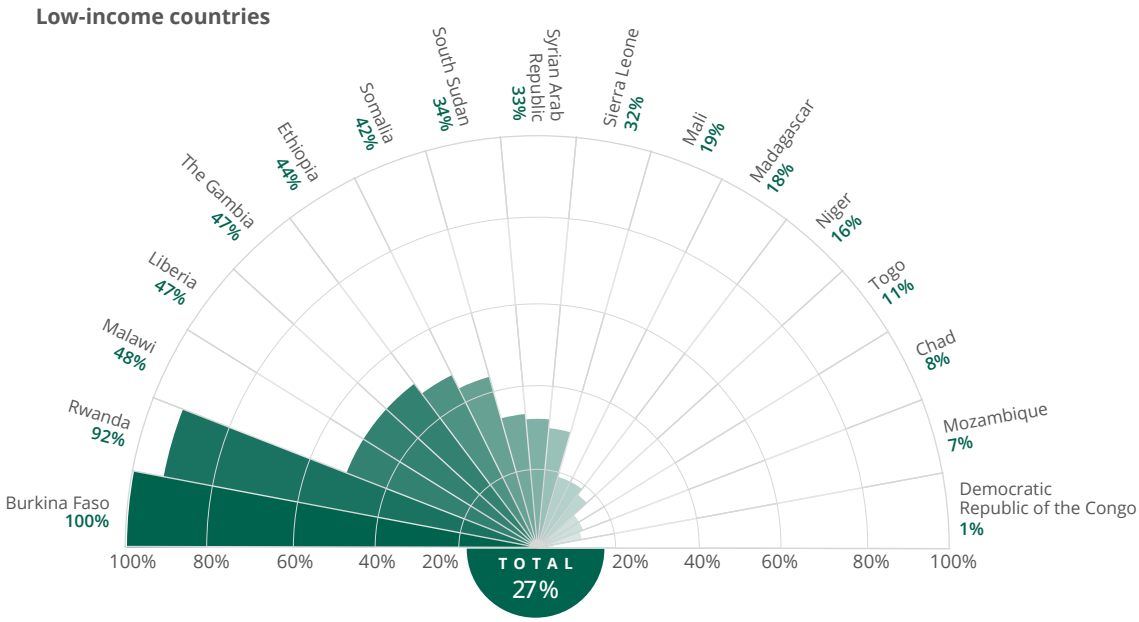


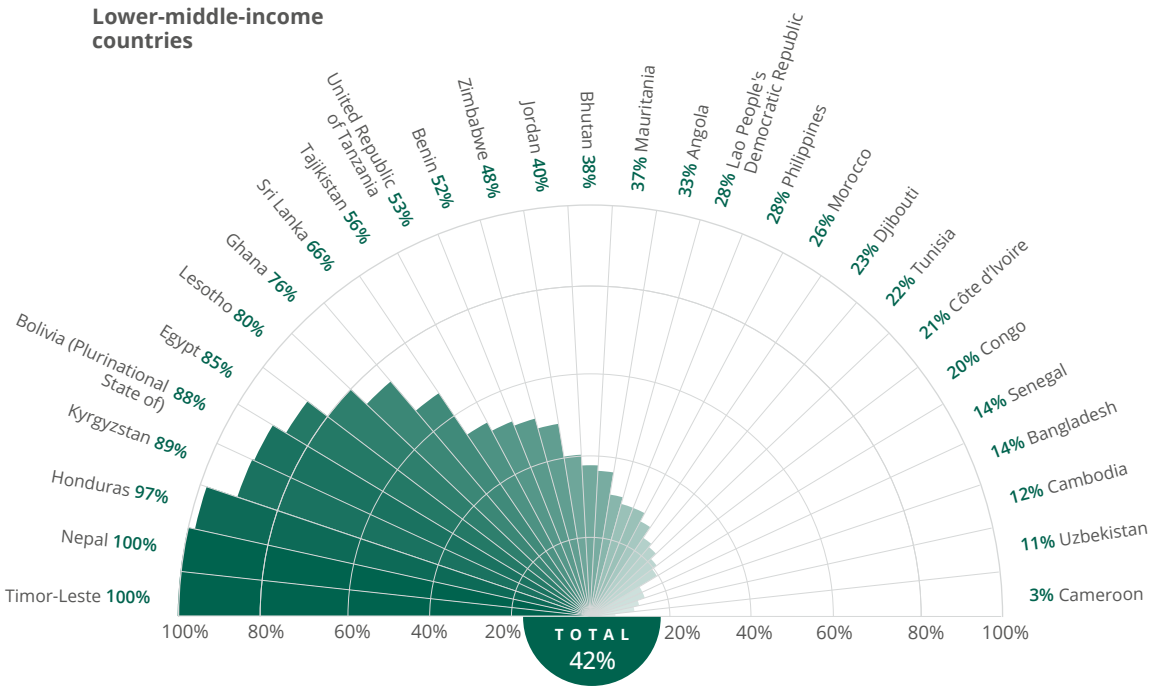
Sources: UNESCO.

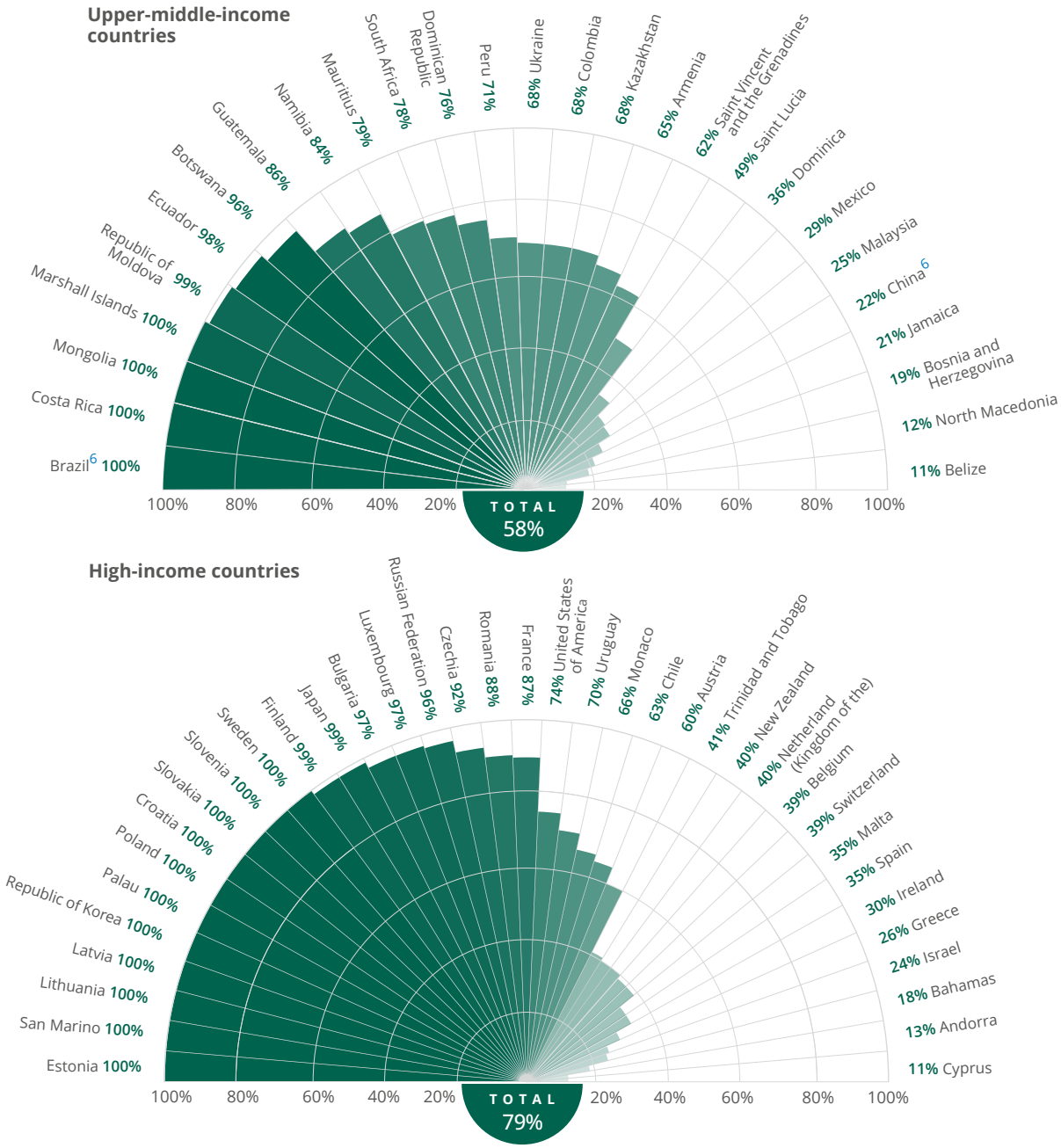
Figure 1.6

Country coverage of school meal programmes by income level

On average, 27 percent of primary schoolchildren in low-income countries receive school meals, compared to 42 percent in lower-middle-income countries, 58 percent in upper-middle-income countries and 79 percent in high-income countries.







Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Survey 2024, WFP estimates, UNESCO.

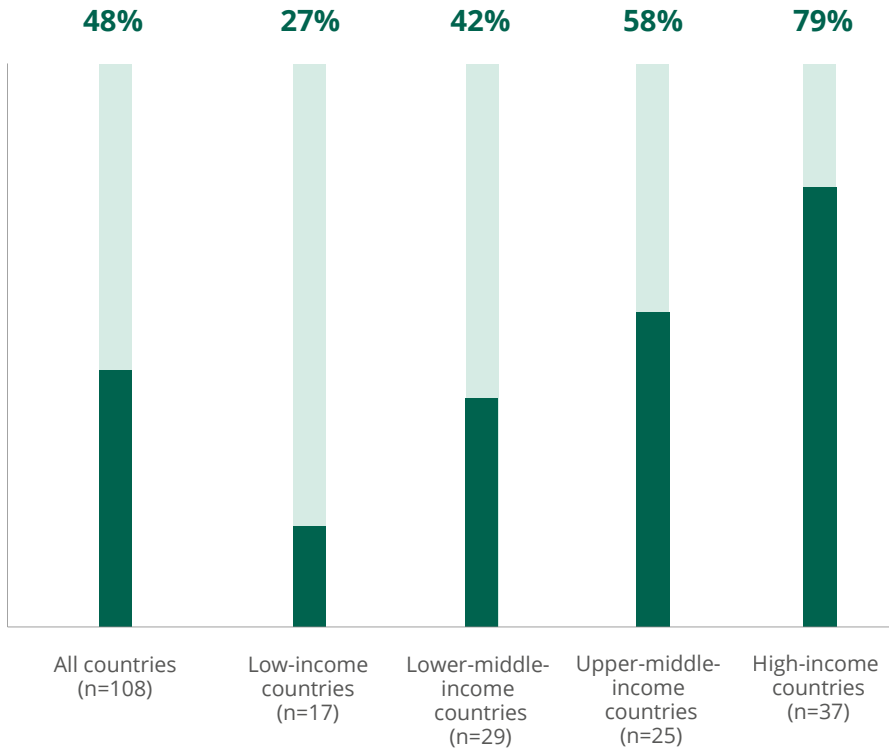
Overall, approximately 50 percent of children enrolled in primary school benefit from school meal programmes globally. Data suggest that coverage increases with income level, low-income, lower-middle-income, upper-middle-income and high-income countries reporting coverage of 27 percent, 42 percent, 58 percent and 79 percent, respectively (see Figure 1.7).

[6] Brazil and China are not included in the estimation of the total (58 percent) in this income group.

Figure 1.7

Coverage in 2024 by income category

On average, school meals coverage for primary school remains lowest in low-income countries and highest in high-income countries.[7]



Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys, WFP estimates, UNESCO.

The school meals coverage indicator and its inclusion in the SDG 4 framework (see Box 1.1) is an important step in advancing the systematic collection of harmonized data at the global level; increasing visibility for school meals; progressing against commitments in different countries; and in efforts to improve data quality at the national level. However, the indicator is limited to primary school level information due to the quality of currently available data for other school levels, and therefore only provides a partial picture. To provide a more granular picture of overall coverage, future efforts by the School Meals Coalition's Data and Monitoring Initiative will focus on additional disaggregation of data by school levels, and capturing the number of children not covered as they do not have access to schools.

[7] Brazil and China excluded from the analysis. Venezuela does not have income classification.

To give a clearer picture on what national programmes cover, additional research, qualitative information and case studies are necessary. Targeting and eligibility for school meal programmes vary across regions and income levels. For example, in a number of countries, school meals mainly target rural communities. To understand whether programmes are fully covering the intended target group, additional disaggregation may be needed. In contexts where programmes have universal coverage, the government may only be collecting data for public schools. A more detailed illustration and calculation for public school coverage for a sample of countries is presented in Annex II.



A girl in Zambia accesses clean water in school. World Vision/Kambani Phiri

Box 1.1
A milestone for school-aged children: towards a global indicator on school meals coverage

For decades, global monitoring frameworks lacked indicators to capture the reach of school meal programmes, despite strong evidence of their multisectoral benefits for children's health, nutrition, education, and for local economies and food systems. The introduction of a global school meals coverage indicator, as part of the SDG 4 framework, is a major breakthrough: for the first time, the international community will be able to track how many primary schoolchildren receive school meals. This powerful global commitment mechanism brings new visibility to school-aged children and strengthens the incentive for governments to monitor and report progress on their school meals coverage.

This milestone is a crucial step that reflects coordinated efforts by the School Meals Coalition through the Research Consortium and Data and Monitoring Initiative to work with governments and partners to test and introduce new indicators to better understand well-being outcomes of school-aged children, build the evidence base and improve data systems worldwide.

Background: The School Meals Coalition's Ministerial Task Force proposed the inclusion of the school meals coverage indicator under the Quality Education Framework. The UNESCO Technical Cooperation Group agreed on the inclusion of the new school meals indicator in 2023. At the time of the writing of this report, the indicator methodology was submitted to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and presented to its board members. The latest available data set will be submitted to UNESCO mid-2025 for release at the end of 2025.

Target: By 2030, ensure that all children have the opportunity to receive a safe, healthy, nutritious meal in schools
Indicator: Proportion of primary schoolchildren receiving school meals (coverage)
Definition: Proportion of school-enrolled children receiving school meals in primary schools (coverage)

Equation to calculate the indicator:

$$C_i = \frac{B_i}{P_i} * 100$$

C_i: School meals coverage rate in primary schools in country i
B_i: Number of children receiving school meals in primary schools in country i, for a given year
P_i: Total number of children enrolled in primary schools of country i, for the same year

Data sources
The numerator: official government statistics, or Global Survey of School Meal Programs
The denominator: UNESCO UIS[8]

Limitations
Data gaps and lack of disaggregated data. The School Meals Coalition's Data and Monitoring Initiative plans to increase the frequency of data collection and introduce additional disaggregation beyond the primary level.

[8] The UNESCO Institute for Statistics official database can be accessed using this *link*.

1.3 Annual financial investment in school meals

According to the latest available data, in 2024, global investment in school meals ranged between US$65.6 billion and US$84 billion per annum, most of which came from domestic budgets. Estimations are based on reported expenditure from 116 countries. The same methodology was used as in the previous *State of School Feeding Worldwide* reports (2022 and 2020) to estimate the missing expenditure using average costs as detailed in Annex II. Estimations for an additional 57 countries were calculated based on average cost per capita of school meals (by income group, derived from reported expenditure) multiplied by the number of children receiving school meals in each of the 57 countries.

Table 1.1 shows annual investment in 116 countries based on actual reported expenditure of US$65.6 billion and a combination of actual and estimated expenditure for 173 countries using a combination of actual and estimated expenditure of around US$84 billion. This is presented as four scenarios providing estimates of the yearly investments in school meals. Only 173 countries were included in the total as two countries were missing the number of children and Venezuela is no longer classified by the World Bank in any income category.

It is important to note that the four scenarios cannot be directly compared to those in the previous edition as they are based on different samples of countries with reported figures. However, the *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022* calculated US$48 billion as the global baseline estimate for funding. The current new global estimate is US$84 billion. This new figure indicates a significant increase in global funding for school meals. More research is needed to understand the drivers of these increases and how much is attributable to price fluctuations, changes in the composition of school meals and changes in programme scale. Similarly, there is a clear need to update school meal costing figures.

A new study will be conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute, Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition and WFP to address this issue.

Table 1.1

Four estimates of the yearly investments in school meals (in US$)

		State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 **100 countries**	State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024 **116 countries**
Countries with reported funding	**Scenario 1** Reported funding	35.3 billion	65.6 billion
	Scenario 2 Estimated funding based on cost per income group	34 billion	65.6 billion
		176 countries	**173 countries**
All countries	**Scenario 3** Reported funding + estimations for remaining countries using cost per income group	49 billion	84 billion
	Scenario 4 Funding estimate for all countries based on cost per income group	48 billion	84 billion

Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Survey 2024, WFP estimates, State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022.

1.4 Sources of funding

As in the 2022 report, evidence on sources of funding for school meal programmes in 2024 is mainly based on the Global School Feeding Survey 2024 (GCNF, 2024) carried out by GCNF. These reported figures include three types of funding, in declining order of scale: domestic funding from national budgets; international donor contributions, channelled through UN agencies, including WFP, and other partners; and funding from national-level donors and the private sector (see Figure 1.9).

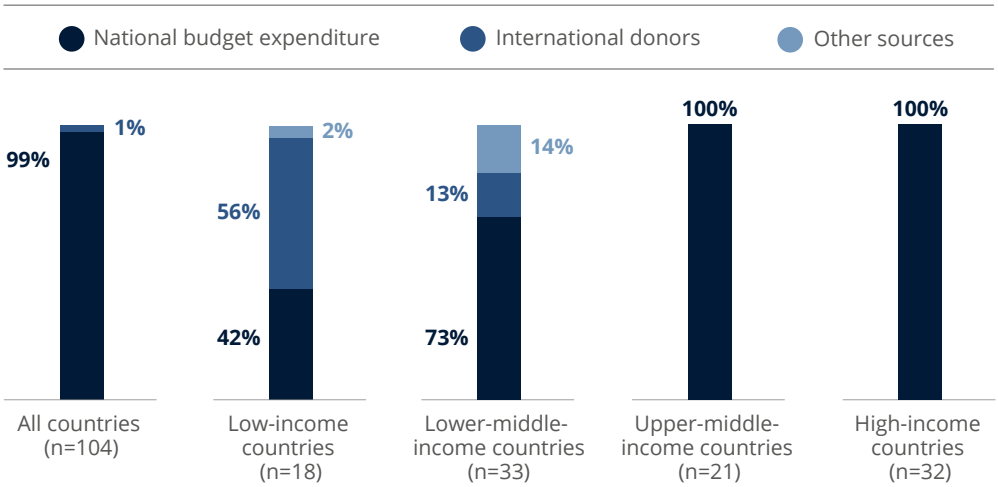
Domestic resources are the main source of funding for school meal programmes in all countries except for low-income countries, where international donors are still the main financial investors. When comparing the same sample of countries in the low-income category, between 2022 and 2024 there is no significant change in the proportion of domestic funding, which has remained stable at around 34 percent (see percentage of funding in Figure 1.9).

Compared to the 2022 data (see Figure 1.9), when comparing the sample of countries with data for all years there is no observable change for any of the income levels, except for lower-middle-income countries where the proportion of investment in school meals from national sources has slightly decreased. However, this change is not statistically significant and can be mostly explained by an increase in external funding for this income group (See Table 1.2).

Figure 1.8

Sources of financial investment in school meals (2024 only)

Domestic funding continues to represent the main source of investment for school meal programmes globally except for low-income countries, where international donors are still the main financial investors.

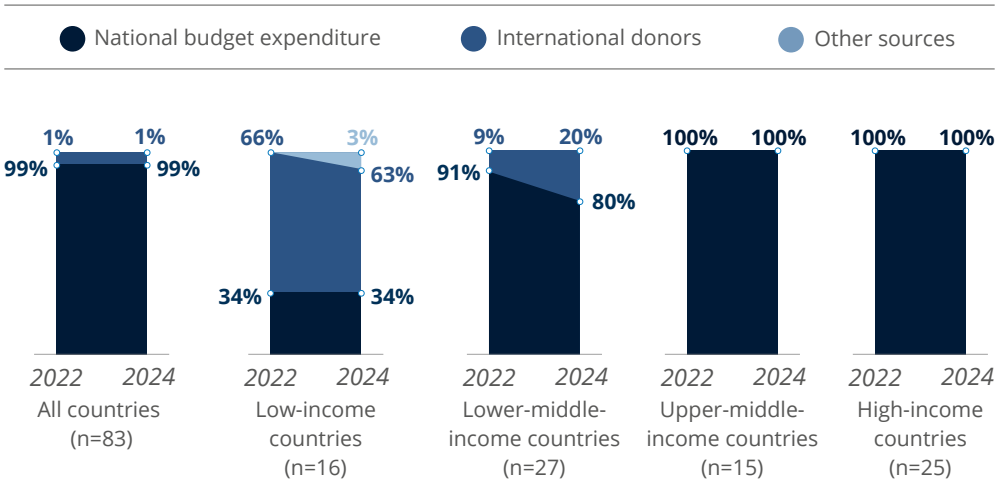


Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Survey 2024.

Figure 1.9

Sources of financial investment in school meals in 2022 and 2024

The pattern of sources of financial investment in school meals remained consistent between 2022 and 2024.



Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys (2021, 2024).

Table 1.2
Comparison of financial investment between 2022 and 2024 (in US$)

	State of School Feeding 2022				
Income level	**Government budget**	**International donors**	**National donors and private sector**	**Other sources**	**Total**
Low	107 million	204 million	-	-	311 million
Lower-middle	778 million	75 million	2 million	-	855 million
Upper-middle	3 billion	-	-	-	3 billion
High	21 billion	85 million	-	-	21 billion
Total	**25 billion**	**364 million**	**2 million**	**-**	**25 billion**
	State of School Feeding 2024				
Income level	**Government budget**	**International donors**	**National donors and private sector**	**Other sources**	**Total**
Low	141 million	264 million	1 million	11 million	417 million
Lower-middle	674 million	173 million	0.5 million	1 million	848 million
Upper-middle	3 billion	4.5 million	5 million	-	3 billion
High	32 billion	3.5 million	7 million	77 million	32 billion
Total	**36 billion**	**445 million**	**14 million**	**89 million**	**37 billion**

Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys (2021, 2024).

As seen in the previous section of this report, overall investments in school meals have increased globally, while at the same time the proportion of national investments has largely remained the same, demonstrating the prioritization of school meals by governments, including in low-income settings. Part of the increased share of international funding at the lower-middle-income level can be explained by increased international support to school meals: an increase from US$364 million in 2022 to US$445 million in 2024. While this represents an approximate 20 percent increase, in terms of absolute value the overall share of external investments in school meals remains modest.

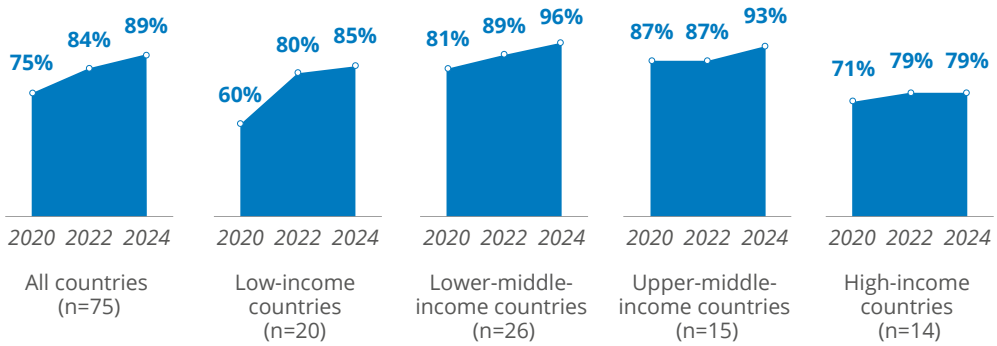
It is also worth highlighting that high-income countries have significantly increased their domestic allocations to school meals, rising from US$21 billion in 2022 to US$32 billion in 2024. This substantial growth signals strong recognition of school meals as an impactful public investment.

1.5 Institutionalization of school meals: policy frameworks and programme design

Newly available data show the continuing trend from the previous two reports of countries strengthening and broadening their policy and legal frameworks governing school meal programmes. A total of 107 countries reported having a school meals policy, of which 19 were low-income countries, 36 were lower-middle-income countries, 22 upper-middle-income countries and 30 high-income countries.

As shown in Figure 1.10, additional countries have adopted school meals policies. The total percentage of countries with school meals policies from those reported stands at 89 percent and is consistently high across all income levels. Additional countries that have adopted new school meals policies include Ukraine (see country case study 8), Central African Republic, Nigeria, Senegal and China.

Figure 1.10
Share of countries with school meals policy frameworks by income level in 2020, 2022 and 2024
Number of countries with a school meals policy has increased globally since 2020 at all income levels.



Sources: GCNF Global Surveys, WFP.

The continuous increase in the number of countries adopting school meals policies, strategies and laws is encouraging. However, not all policies are made the same and not all necessarily demonstrate long-term commitment, as they may be time bound. An additional sign of commitment is in being a member of the School Meals Coalition, where countries make detailed pledges on the improvements they intend to make to policy and legislation (see Figure 2.3 in Chapter 2 for more details and examples). Box 1.2 on policy and legislation provides examples of good practices, including from Brazil (see country case study 4).

Box 1.2
Policies, legislation and the path to a legal basis for school meals

To support stronger, more effective legislation on school meals, in 2024 the School Meals Coalition partnered with the International Parliamentary Network for Education to develop a dedicated toolkit[9] for parliamentarians, in collaboration with the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition. This resource equips lawmakers with practical guidance and evidence to advocate for laws that secure the long-term sustainability of school meal programmes.

While presidents and heads of state champion school meal programmes by adopting policies, laws are what translate political commitments into sustainable actions. School meal programmes that are embedded in legislation offer several advantages, including:

- predictable and sustained financing beyond political cycles;
- clearly defined institutional roles and responsibilities;
- legislative oversight of programme implementation; and
- transparency, public engagement and community ownership.

A sound legal framework for school meals may consist of several types of legislation, each addressing different aspects of the programme. These can be grouped into three broad categories:

- A framework law focused on regulating the delivery of school meals and other school-based health and nutrition services that may be included in the programme.

[9] *"School meals: A toolkit for parliamentarians"* produced by the International Parliamentary Network for Education, WFP and the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition provides detailed guidance on designing school meals legislation. This publication can be accessed at www.ipned.org/schoolmeals.

- Laws establishing an entitlement to school meals. These are often included as provisions under broader legislation.
- Laws establishing linkages with school meals and multiple sectors. For example, social protection, food standards, procurement, agricultural production or land use legislation.

Many countries begin with a school meals policy framework and gradually establish laws to reinforce and institutionalize their school meal programmes. For example, in 1979, the small island state of Cabo Verde, off the west African coast, launched a national school meal programme with the support of WFP. Thirty-six years later in 2015, Cabo Verde enacted a school meals law, which secured full and effective national ownership of the programme.

Brazil's school feeding law is a globally recognized example of successful legislation supporting the quality and sustainability of school meals. The law established guidelines for Brazil's National School Feeding Programme (PNAE—Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar) and outlines key elements of Brazil's school meal programme including coverage, management, standards for delivery time, types of food that can be served, public participation, procurement models, monitoring and pedagogical tools such as school gardens.

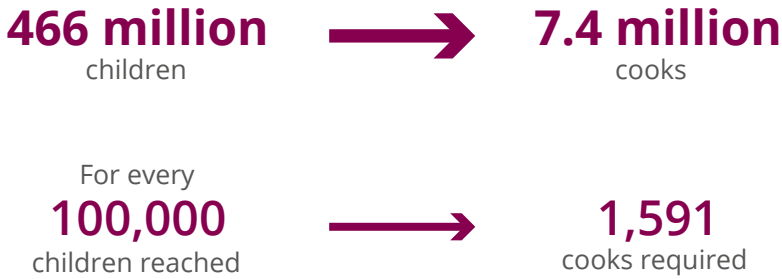
As countries move to create, expand and improve their school meal programmes, establishing a legislative basis can be an important step for long-term impact. As part of the School Meals Coalition's commitment to improve the availability of mission-critical data on school meal programmes, future editions of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* will increasingly include more qualitative data and research on policy and legislation.

1.6 School meals and employment

As part of the 2024 Global Survey of School Meal Programs administered by GCNF, new data were collected on the jobs created directly by school meals. These data aim to provide new insight into employment dynamics, yet another multisectoral aspect of school meal programmes.

For this edition, the analysis is based on a sample of 76 countries from all income level groups, providing school meals to approximately 141.5 million children. The calculation for direct jobs only includes cooks due to countries' limited reporting on other direct job categories linked to difficulties in tracking and weaknesses in national monitoring systems. These 76 countries reported that school meal programmes directly created approximately 2.25 million jobs (cooks), equivalent to 1,591 cooks for every 100,000 children receiving school meals. We can assume that these are conservative estimates as they only focus on one category of direct jobs. At the same time, the reported figures and calculated averages reconfirm that school meal programmes are a major source of direct employment consistent with previous estimates ranging between 1,000 and 2,000 jobs per 100,000 children. Based on these averages, the estimated total number of cooks required for the 466 million children receiving school meals globally is approximately 7.4 million.

Figure 1.11
Jobs created for every 100,000 children receiving school meals (n=76)
On average, school meal programmes create around 1,591 direct jobs (cooks) for every 100,000 children receiving school meals.



Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys, WFP (estimates, Annual Country Reports), World Bank (2018).

These estimates are based on only one direct job category and do not include indirect employment or business opportunities generated by school meals, for instance when local farmers benefit from programmes implemented under a home-grown school meals model. Further work is necessary not only to better track and estimate direct and indirect jobs linked to the provision of school meals, but also to assess the quality of these jobs, such as the level of compensation and their stability.



A school cook in Kenya prepares lunch.
WFP/Lisa Murray

1.7 Integrated school health and nutrition programmes

School health and nutrition programmes typically include an integrated package of interventions that together seek to meet the needs of the learner in the local context. School meals may be one of these components, other complementary activities may include: handwashing with soap, deworming, weight measurement, height measurement, menstrual hygiene, eye testing, dental cleaning, hearing test, anaemia test, school gardens, drinking water and water purification.

As part of the latest GCNF Global Survey of School Meal Programs, new data were collected on these 12 complementary activities (see Figure 1.12). Data were drawn from a sample of 126 countries included in the survey and are summarized below. Overall, only ten countries (8 percent) reported having no complementary programme in place; 23 percent of countries had one to three complementary programmes; and approximately 69 percent reported four or more complementary activities provided with school meals. As shown in Figure 1.12, the most common complementary programme was handwashing with soap (N. 108, 86 percent).

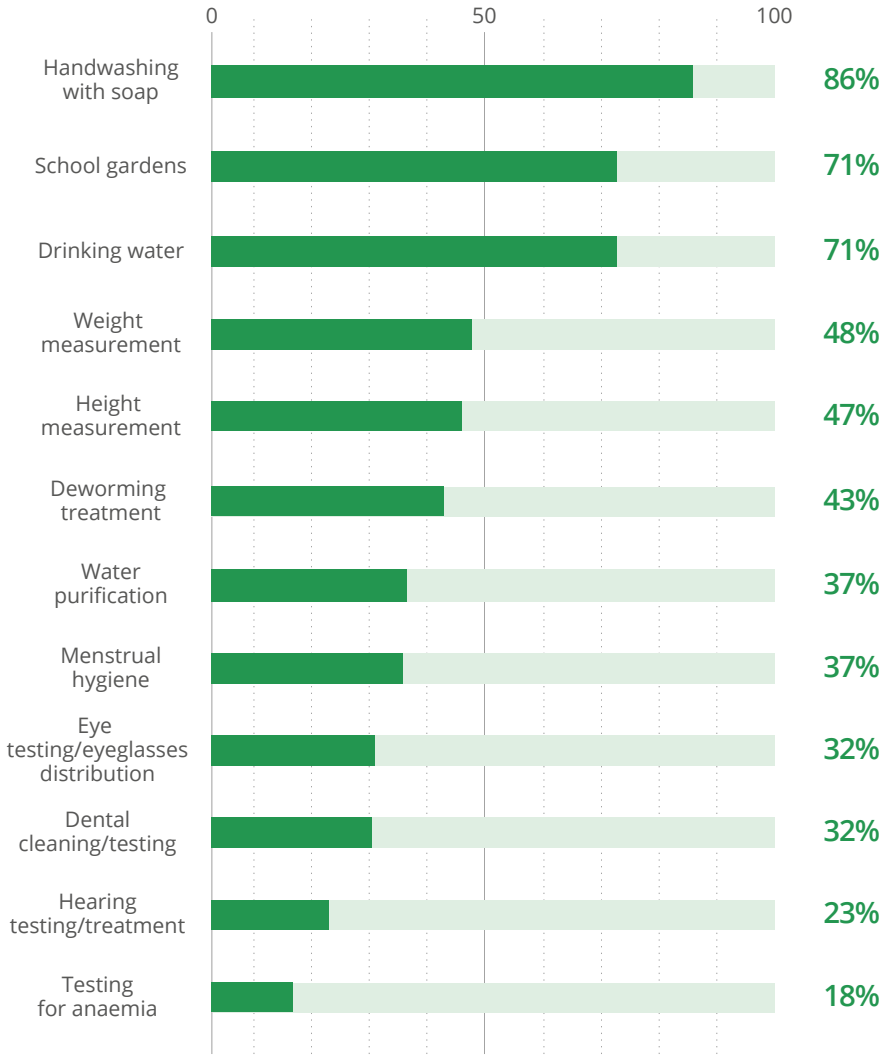


A girl eats a hot meal in school in Romania.
World Vision/Maria Manole

Figure 1.12

Complementary health and nutrition programmes (n=126)

Handwashing continues to be the most common complementary programme implemented in conjunction with school meals.

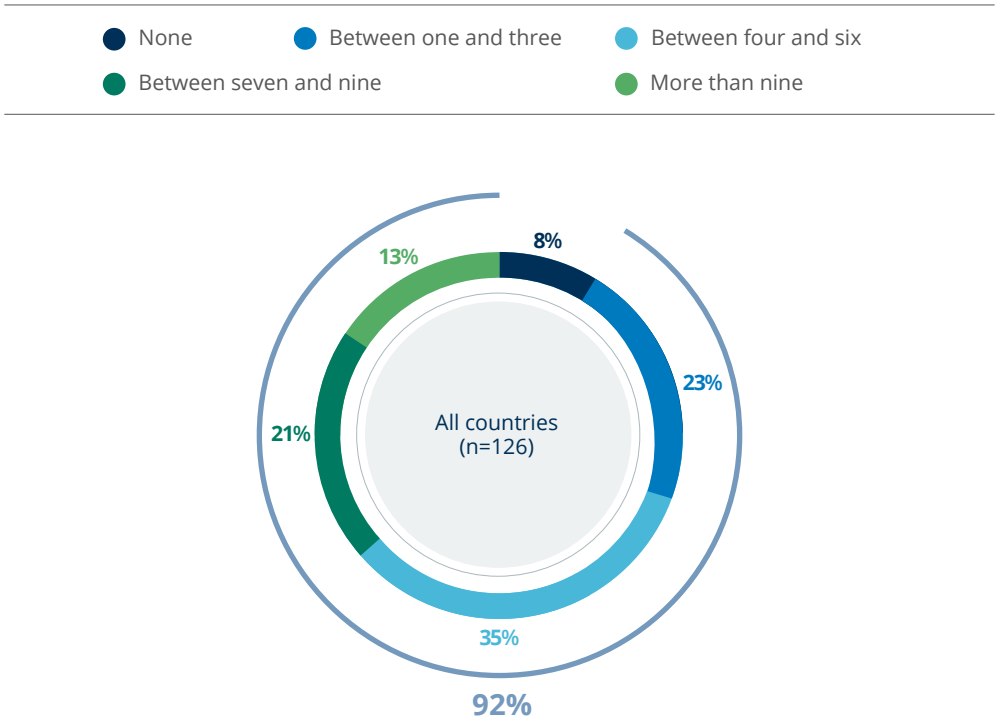


Source: GCNF Global Survey 2024.

Figure 1.13

Adoption of complementary health and nutrition programmes

More than 90 percent of governments implement school meals in conjunction with complementary health and nutrition interventions. Approximately 70 percent of governments deliver a fully integrated package of at least four interventions.



Source: GCNF Global Survey 2024.

1.8 City-led solutions: advancing school meals at the subnational level

For the first time since the launch of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* publication, this report provides a snapshot of subnational data on school meals at the municipal level. This addition recognizes the importance of localization and the significant role of municipalities in implementing school meal programmes. Given that in many countries school meal programmes are established and managed directly by local governments, mayors have a daily direct contact with final users and therefore a primary political responsibility for ensuring infrastructure and services are in place to support the delivery of school meals. While national governments define the framework for action and priorities to be targeted, cities directly implement school meals, where positive results can be concretely observed by citizens. Cities also possess up-to-date data and first hand experiences of their citizens' needs in terms of food systems and nutrition, especially when related to school meals.

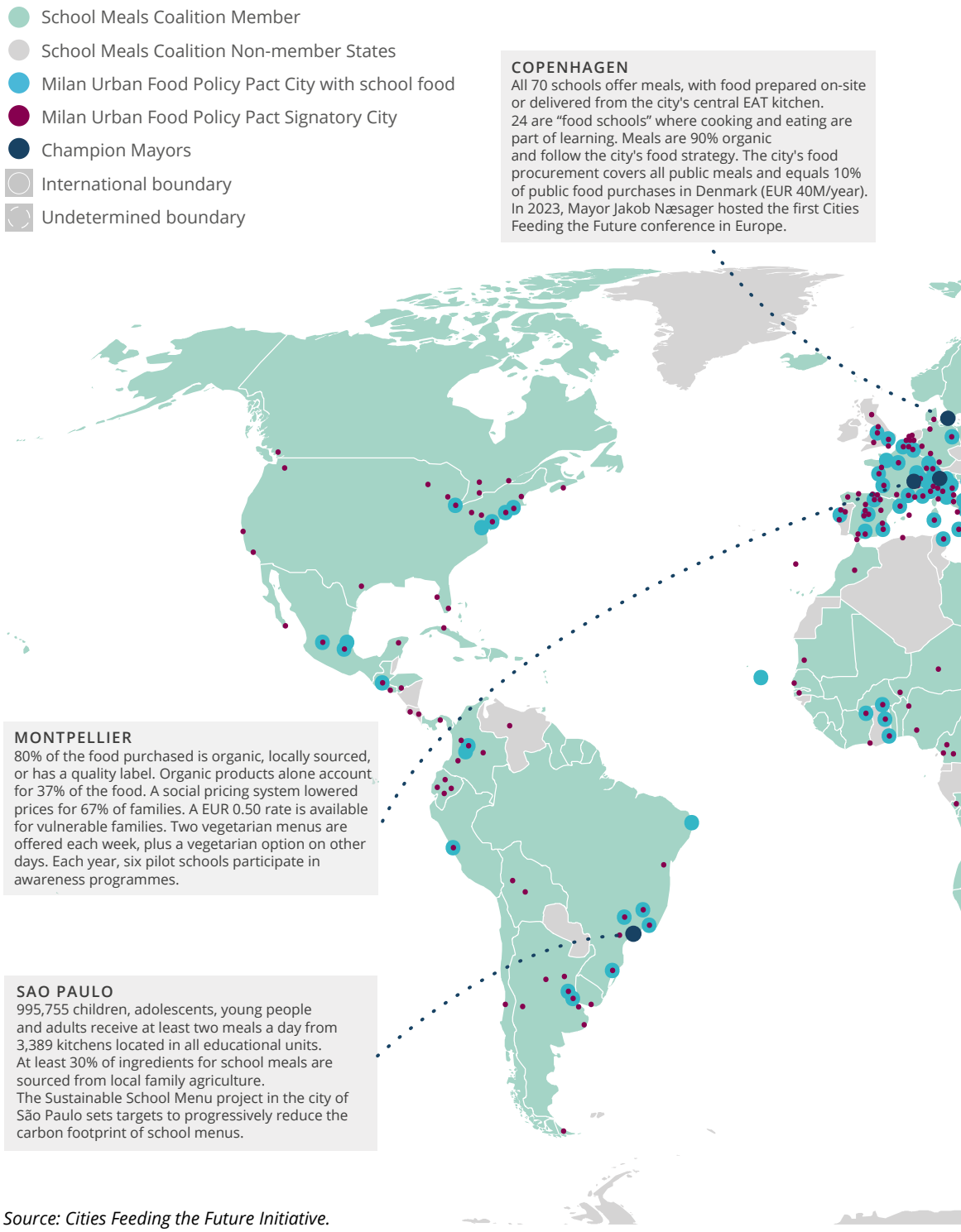
Since its creation in 2023, the School Meals Coalition's Cities Feeding the Future Initiative is paving the way for change at the municipal level. Chapter 2 provides a detailed overview of the Initiative; Chapter 3 describes its data collection efforts; and this chapter highlights key data points from participating cities. Map 1.2 explores innovations across Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Copenhagen, Montpellier, Nairobi, São Paulo and Seoul.

As data and knowledge on school meals become increasingly available through the efforts of the Data and Monitoring and Cities Feeding the Future Initiatives at both national and subnational levels, it is envisioned that data from cities will be integrated and featured within the School Meals Coalition's global database.[10] Combining knowledge and data from national and subnational levels of governance will help foster exchanges and learning on the design and implementation of school meals through differences and synergies across local contexts.

[10] The School Meals Coalition database can be accessed using this link *https://www.schoolmealscoalitiondatabase.wfp.org/*.

Map 1.2

City-level innovation in school meal programmes: a subnational snapshot

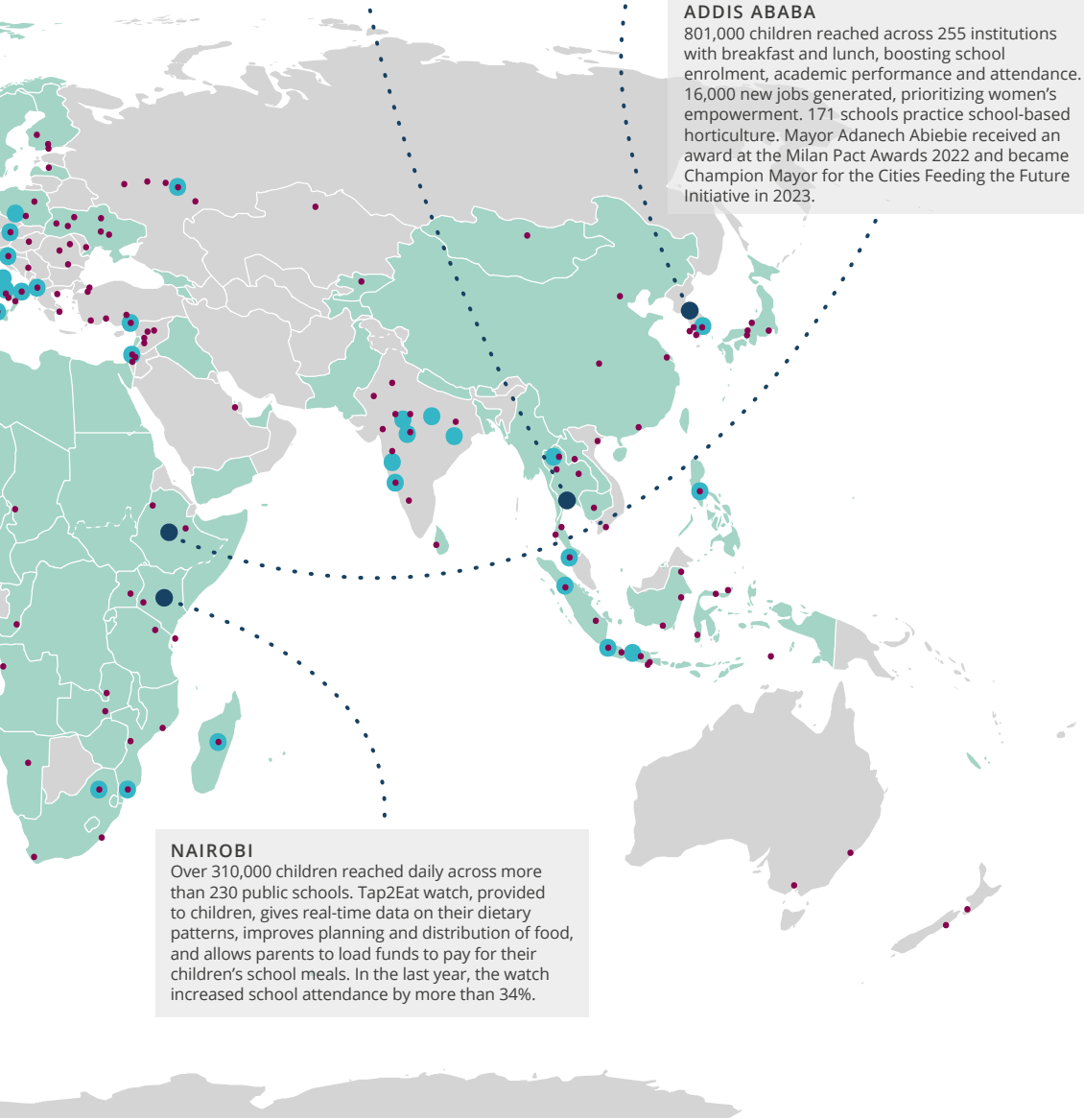


Source: Cities Feeding the Future Initiative.

BANGKOK
Initiated a school canteen policy offering free breakfast and lunch. The school meal programme serves 250,000 children every day across 437 BMA affiliated schools. The Thai School Lunch online platform is used to help schools plan purchases and meals and enable the city to check food quality, increasing participation from the education department of district offices and other institutions.

SEOUL
Free meals to all students (kindergarten to high school) since 2011. Over 1,300 schools supplied with safe, quality ingredients from an innovative distribution centre, and meals undergo rigorous inspections. Guidelines require schools to purchase over 70% of environmentally friendly produce.

ADDIS ABABA
801,000 children reached across 255 institutions with breakfast and lunch, boosting school enrolment, academic performance and attendance. 16,000 new jobs generated, prioritizing women's empowerment. 171 schools practice school-based horticulture. Mayor Adanech Abiebie received an award at the Milan Pact Awards 2022 and became Champion Mayor for the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative in 2023.



NAIROBI
Over 310,000 children reached daily across more than 230 public schools. Tap2Eat watch, provided to children, gives real-time data on their dietary patterns, improves planning and distribution of food, and allows parents to load funds to pay for their children's school meals. In the last year, the watch increased school attendance by more than 34%.

1.9 Way forward

The new data suggest a significant positive trajectory for school meals globally since the creation of the School Meals Coalition in 2021. Since publication of the 2020 *State of School Feeding Worldwide* report, the number of children covered by school meals globally has increased by roughly 20 percent. This level of success is underpinned by school meals emerging as a clear policy priority for countries at all income levels. For high and upper-middle-income countries, the focus is in shifting to quality and efficiency gains, while low-income countries are focusing on rapid scale-up.

Although donor funding in absolute terms represents a very small share of overall investment in school meals, the probable significant decrease in international aid in the coming years risks losing the gains made in low-income countries. Quality data that enables evidence-based decision making will therefore be even more critical in the years to come. This should include:

- Since the adoption of the new SDG 4 indicator, continued institutionalization of school meal indicators in international monitoring frameworks and reporting, improving data quality (including disaggregation) and the visibility of school meals.
- Improved global data architecture for school meals; streamlined and harmonized data collection; and strengthened quality of monitoring systems and statistics at the national level.
- Improved publicly available data on school meals, including at the subnational and municipal levels. With the creation of the School Meals Coalition's database, the core set of indicators systematically reported in the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* is available as a global public good. The Data and Monitoring Initiative will ensure that new indicators are tested and included in the database to fill existing data gaps with strong government demand (home-grown school meals, food system indicators, quality of meals, etc.).

This chapter has presented the latest available data and attempted to interpret its significance, but it also highlights the need for additional research. Examples of significant research required to inform future programming include better understanding of the drivers of costs and efficient models; and qualitative understanding of policies and legislation and their links to the multisectoral benefits of school meals.

Case study 1

Kenya's ambitious vision to feed 10 million schoolchildren while strengthening local food systems and resilience to shocks by 2030

Kenya has invested in school meals since 1980, using school meals as a powerful tool to boost education and food security in the country's most vulnerable communities. The Kenya school meal programme initially focused on food-insecure regions to increase school enrolment, retention and learning outcomes. By 2008, it had grown from reaching 240,000 children to 1.2 million across 3,850 primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas of the country.

That same year, the Kenyan government developed a strategic plan to transition the school meal programme to full government ownership. By 2018, the school meal programme was fully managed by the government, serving over 1.5 million children.

Kenya has since emerged as a regional and global leader in strengthening school meal programmes, driven by a commitment to the well-being of children and communities. In 2021, Kenya joined the global School Meals Coalition and became one of the 12 members of the Coalition's task force.

Demonstrating national ownership of the School Meals Coalition's vision, in 2024, the Government of Kenya launched Africa's first-ever national chapter of the School Meals Coalition. WFP Kenya serves as the chapter's secretariat, building on over 40 years of partnership between the government and WFP in Kenya. The National School Meals Coalition is a platform designed to bring together all key stakeholders in government and local development partners to ensure coordinated support for the scale-up of the school meal programme.

Under President Ruto's leadership, school meals are now central to Kenya's broader development strategy. In 2023, the President set an ambitious target to reach all 10 million school-aged children with meals by 2030. Progress is well under way. Between 2023 and 2024, the number of children receiving school meals grew from 1.8 million to 2.6 million.

Kenya's approach is not just about scale, it's about sustainability. The government is embedding planet-friendly practices into the programme to reduce its environmental footprint and strengthen local food systems. This shift is guided by the Operational Plan for School Meal Programme Scale-up 2024–2030, developed with support from partners including the Rockefeller Foundation and WFP. Key elements include:

- Shifting from imported food to more locally grown and sourced food, promoting the uptake of drought-tolerant crops and regenerative agriculture.
- Optimizing school meal menus by prioritizing local, sustainable foods that are cost-effective, nutritious and resilient to climate change adaption.
- Procuring through an "aggregator model" to enhance efficiency and local involvement. This approach involves sourcing food from smallholder farmers through cooperatives at the county level, reducing transportation distances, cutting emissions and strengthening local food systems.
- Shifting from traditional cooking methods to clean, energy-efficient alternatives to reduce deforestation, lower carbon emissions and improve the health and safety of cooking environments for school communities.

To inspire Kenya in its journey to scale up provision of school meals, WFP and its Centre of Excellence in Brazil jointly facilitated a study visit by the Kenyan government to Brazil in 2024. Useful lessons in terms of planet-friendly, home-grown school meals and intergovernmental collaboration were brought back to Kenya and incorporated in the establishment and action plan of Kenya's National School Meals Coalition.

The Kenyan government's bold vision is attracting interest and support from various partners such as the Global Partnership for Education, Rockefeller Foundation, Novo Nordisk Foundation, International Development Research Centre, SDG Fund, France, Germany, Sweden, the WFP Centre of Excellence in Brazil and several initiatives within the School Meals Coalition, which provide technical and financial support.

Case study 2

From vision to action: Rwanda's road map for a universal and sustainable school meal programme

In October 2024, the Government of Rwanda launched two important strategic documents: the National School Feeding Strategy 2023–2032, and – as a global innovation – a specific National School Feeding Programme Financing Strategy, which was endorsed and published by the government.

The National School Feeding Strategy 2023–2032 draws on lessons learned during the rapid scale-up of the national school meal programme from 796,256 students in 2019 to universal coverage of 4,475,919 million children by 2024. The strategy highlights the contribution of school meals to Rwanda's overall education strategy. Recognizing school meals' crucial role in the nation's human capital development by reducing school drop-out rates and class repetition, the school meal programme supports the Ministry of Education's goal to improve learning outcomes. The strategy proposes a set of innovations to improve effectiveness and efficiency, foster multisectoral cooperation and accommodate the growing school population. Specific innovations include a more systematic adjustment to changing food prices; a resilience plan for external shocks; enhanced financial management and transparency; more cost-efficient procurement; a tax waiver for school meals food procurement; closer alignment with the national environment and climate change adaption agenda (including a specific strategy to achieve clean cooking); and ensuring sufficient and adequate human resources for high-quality programme implementation. The strategy includes a comprehensive, multisectoral institutional framework for cooperation, as well as a results framework with outcomes in education, health and nutrition, social protection and agriculture.

The National School Feeding Programme Financing Strategy identifies the total cost of the national school meal programme, including food, implementation, infrastructure, management, monitoring and reporting, and continuous capacity strengthening. The expected costs are calculated based on school population growth, inflation and depreciation of investments. Funding gaps are identified by evaluating current and future contributions from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Infrastructure and parents (both cash and in-kind). To reduce the funding gap, the National School Feeding Programme Financing Strategy identified several cost-saving measures, such as more efficient procurement, menu planning and using centralized kitchens in urban areas. The remaining funding gap can be reduced by increasing contributions from governments and parents, through public–private partnerships and crowd funding. These measures should enable the government to fund its universal school meal programme fully and sustainably within 6–7 years. Until then, temporary, external support will be required.

To develop both strategies, the Ministry of Education led bilateral and working group consultations to bring together a wide range of voices, including sectoral ministries, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, District officials, school leaders, teachers, parents and non-governmental partners including national and international civil society organizations (CSOs), private sector representatives and UN agencies. WFP played an important role by supporting the process technically and financially.

Chapter 2

The School Meals Coalition – a global movement for school meals



The President of Kenya and the delegates of the School Meals Coalition Task Force after the opening ceremony of the Second Ministerial Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya. WFP/Arete/Edwin Nyamasyo

The School Meals Coalition was launched by 46 countries at the UN Food System Summit in September 2021, under the leadership of Finland and France. It was created in response to the COVID-19 crisis, when almost all countries closed their schools, leaving 370 million schoolchildren without access to the one meal a day they could rely on (WFP, 2020a). Brazil joined as co-chair of the Coalition in 2023. Since its creation, the School Meals Coalition has become one of the most successful initiatives of recent times.

Through an increasingly complex and powerful political network of action, representing more than 60 percent of the world's population, the School Meals Coalition is a continuously evolving experiment that has created a new multilateral and multisectoral model of collaboration for the twenty-first century. This is especially important at a time when long-standing paradigms are being challenged and reinvented, including the role of Official Development Assistance.

The School Meals Coalition focuses on the concrete and shared purpose of ensuring that all children have access to a daily, nutritious meal in school by 2030. This global goal is then translated by each government into multisectoral domestic commitments reflecting diverse national contexts, political realities and needs. In many cases, these commitments have already been translated into large-scale, meaningful results (some of which are showcased in this chapter).

The design of the School Meals Coalition explicitly incorporated concepts of systems theory and thinking. It aims to create a culture of collaboration among countries by fostering an environment where every government can both share its experiences and learn from others, breaking outdated dichotomies of global north and global south, or donor and recipient dynamics between countries. Instead, the Coalition is a space where every country, regardless of its income level or geographical location, has something to contribute, resources to share, a willingness to receive support and take inspiration from others.

At the heart of the Coalition's success is its innovative model of distributed leadership. By helping to create and empower networks of partners that do not depend on one agency, one partner or one stakeholder alone, the Coalition has orchestrated a more efficient, decentralized way of supporting governments to make progress. Through this expanding ecosystem, the Coalition's secretariat and initiatives help to inspire, encourage and orchestrate action.

Measuring the results of this systemic approach is challenging, not least because it is difficult to attribute or connect a specific result to a specific action. Some results are also difficult to measure or monitor in any centralized way, e.g. the extent to which political will has been created; the number of connections that have been made within the Coalition's network to create productive partnerships that deliver results; or the extent to which connecting countries has led to more knowledge being shared and how it has been put into practice.

Over the coming years, the Coalition's secretariat will explore how to refine measurement of its systemic approach and how to usefully report on what is happening within this network of networks. This will be supported by specialized partners, focusing on studying and developing systemic leadership practices.

It is important to do justice to and recognize the work and contributions of the individuals, communities, governments and partners that make up the Coalition's ecosystem and, with their collective action, are making it so successful. This Chapter presents the current results and existing quantitative and qualitative information, illustrating the value that has been created by the School Meals Coalition through this new collaborative model.



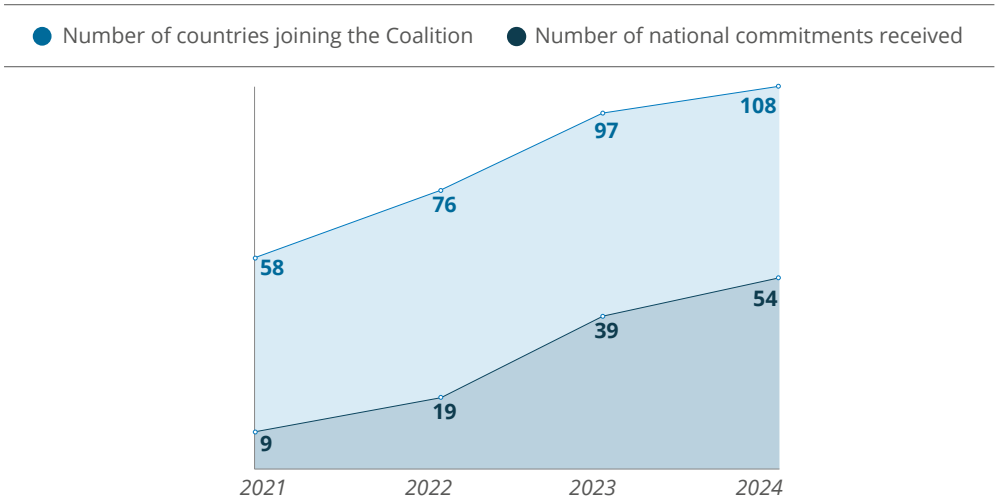
First Global School Meals Summit in France, 2023 with left to right: H.E. Ihor Kuzin; Deputy Minister of Health of Ukraine; H.E. Ms Alexis Taylor; US Undersecretary of Agriculture; H.E. Dr Dulce Soares; Minister of Education; Timor-Leste; H.E. Ms Yasmine Sherif, Executive Director, Education Cannot Wait; H.E. Ms Isabel Maria Correia Viegas de Abreu; Minister of Education; Culture and Science; São Tomé and Príncipe; H.E. Mr Jean-Luc Mouthou; Minister of Preschool; Primary; Secondary Education and Literacy; Republic of Congo, Mr Robert Jenkins; Director, Education and Adolescent Development; UNICEF. WFP/Rein Skullerud

2.1 The School Meals Coalition: governments making unprecedented progress supported by partners

At the time of writing, the School Meals Coalition has united more than 100 governments from all income levels, six regional and subregional bodies, and over 140 diverse partners from civil society, academia, think tanks, foundations, UN agencies and the international financial institutions that support them – reflecting the Coalition's truly global reach. The Coalition benefits from an exceptionally high level of sustained political support, with guidance from a task force of ministers and regular engagement from presidents and heads of state. The Coalition's overarching goal is to expand the scale and quality of school meal programmes globally as a means to address several interconnected challenges in education, nutrition, food systems and inequality, as well as challenges caused by disasters and shocks.

As countries join the Coalition, they are encouraged to issue domestic commitments that form the basis for country progress and for subregional, regional and global collaboration efforts. At the time of writing, 54 national commitments have been submitted to the Coalition. Figure 2.1 illustrates the number of countries that have joined the School Meals Coalition, when they joined and those that have submitted commitments.

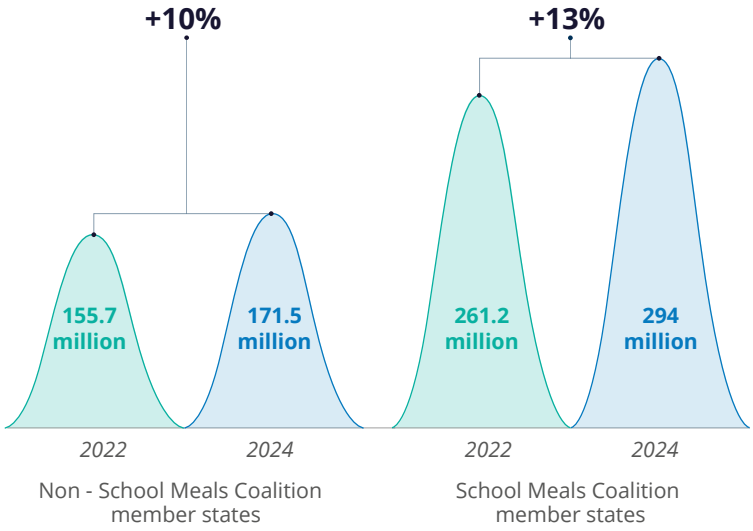
Figure 2.1
Number of countries joining the School Meals Coalition by year and commitment submission



Source: School Meals Coalition secretariat.

The data presented in Chapter 1 revealed that, since 2022, approximately 32 million additional children are being supported by school meals in countries that are members of the School Meals Coalition. This represents an increase of approximately 13 percent, outpacing the 10 percent expansion in school meal provision for non-Coalition countries. Similarly, reported investment in school meals has increased by US$11 billion in Coalition member countries, representing a 45 percent increase, compared to a more moderate 35 percent increase for non-member countries. Finally, the five countries (Ukraine, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Senegal and China) that have adopted new school meals policies since the last edition of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* are all members of the School Meals Coalition.

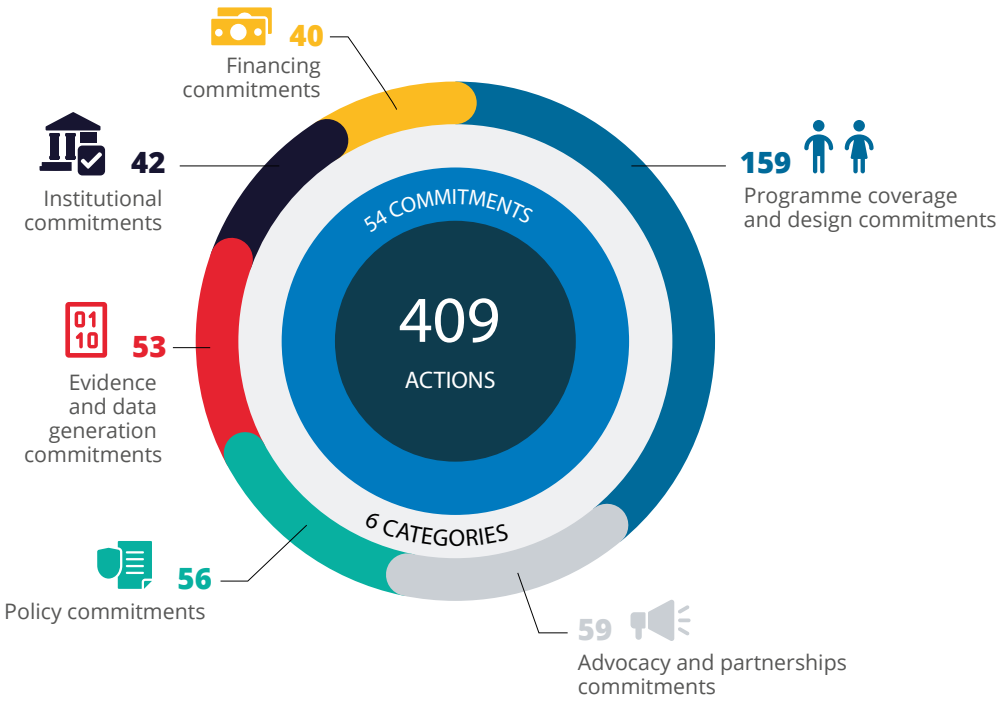
Figure 2.2
Total number of children receiving school meals in School Meals Coalition member states versus non-member states, *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022* and *2024* (in millions)



Sources: School Meals Coalition, direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys, WFP (estimates, Annual Country Reports) and World Bank (2018).

Beyond the scale-up of school meal programmes, countries are also committing to improving the quality and sustainability of their programmes. Through their national commitments, Coalition member countries committed to 409 actions across six categories: policy, financing, institutional, programme design and coverage, evidence and data, and advocacy and partnerships.

Figure 2.3
National commitments to the School Meals Coalition, broken down by categories



Source: School Meals Coalition secretariat.

Among the Coalition member states that have submitted national commitments, most have set specific targets and timelines – establishing clear benchmarks for progress. Concrete, effective commitments attract more support from partners, furthering government efforts and ambitions.

Depending on the national context, state of the national school meal programme and needs, commitments can vary – ranging from establishing a foundation to create a national school meal programme, to committing to well-designed and universal school meals. Table 2.1 provides examples of commitments per category.

Table 2.1

Examples of national commitments to the School Meals Coalition

Category		Examples
 **Policy commitments**	Commitments in this category ensure that national school meal programmes are prioritized in national and sectoral plans, policies, strategies, laws or other legal frameworks.	**Benin** committed to adopting and disseminating a school feeding law by 2025, ensuring the financial stability and sustainability of the National Integrated School Meal Programme.
		Iraq committed to implementing a national school meals policy by 2023 and establishing a school feeding law by 2025.
		Tanzania committed to including school meals in the National Food and Nutrition Policy by 2027 as a strategy to promote good nutrition among school-aged children.
 **Financing commitments**	These commitments include (i) national commitments to establish a dedicated budget line for the national school meal programme or (ii) international commitments towards supporting programmes in other countries that do not have the necessary resources.	**Sri Lanka** committed to establishing a sustainable financing initiative by 2030, featuring a cross-sectoral ministerial budget line for its school meal programme and increasing the annual allocation from US$61 million to US$204 million.
		Chad committed to increase funding each year by 15 percent from 2024.
		Germany has supported school meal programmes in different countries and contexts to improve the nutritional situation of children and their families. A notable example is the Accelerating School Meals project, a five-year, EUR22 million initiative in support of home-grown and climate-sensitive school meals in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Sierra Leone.
 **Institutional commitments**	These commitments include strengthening institutional capacities and coordination skills to lead and deliver school meal programmes at all levels, such as commitments to establish standards and plans, for example nutrition guidance, as well as multisectoral working committees or working groups.	**Lesotho** committed to form a high-level school feeding steering committee chaired by the Principal Secretary of Education and Training, comprised of principal secretaries or senior officers from the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Social Development, Local Government, Trade, Cabinet (Food & Nutrition Coordination Office) and development partners.
		Iraq committed to establishing an inter-ministerial coordination committee on school meals by 2024, and to creating entities and coordination mechanisms that are empowered, adequately staffed, have the necessary capacity and are well-funded by 2026.
		Tajikistan committed to developing and endorsing a transition plan from WFP's School Feeding Development Project (funded by development partners) to a national school meal programme funded from government budget.

Category			Examples
 **Programme coverage & design commitments**	Subcategory 1: Programme coverage commitments	This category invites commitments aimed at increasing the reach of school meal programmes. Of the 54 commitments, more than 30 countries have made specific commitments around increasing coverage.	**Sri Lanka** and **Benin** both committed to reaching universal coverage by 2026.
			Kenya committed to reaching universal coverage by 2030.
			Tajikistan committed to reach more than 50 percent of primary students with school meals by 2027.
	Subcategory 2: Programme design commitments	Commitments in this category are about improving the quality of national programmes according to the national and local context, needs and gaps. For instance, they specify the percentage of food to be purchased locally from smallholder farmers as part of a national law/ policy; linking school meal programmes to at least four other multisectoral interventions; or making school menus more nutritious.	**Guinea** committed to using 80 percent of local produce in school canteens by 2030.
			France committed to serving 50 percent sustainable products and at least 20 percent organic products in national school meals.
			Luxembourg committed to promoting 0 km food and short-distance purchasing, and committed to combatting food waste and plastic pollution in school canteens by adapting meal offers, selling leftover food at reduced prices, setting up drinking fountains and avoiding single use plastic.
			Lesotho has mandated sourcing 80 percent of food commodities for school meals from local smallholder farmers, emphasizing eco-friendly farming practices, food safety, nutrition and health.
			Tajikistan committed to upgrading 100 percent of school canteens with modern tools and infrastructure by 2027.

Category		Examples
 **Evidence and data generation commitments**	Commitments on evidence and data generation can include country efforts to generate evidence and improve data collection, analysis and dissemination and ensure its integration into policy and decision making processes.	**Sri Lanka** committed to implementing a digitalization strategy and tool that will allow the National School Health Policy to be monitored at all levels (school/provincial/ national) by 2026.
		Rwanda committed to support and build connections between national academic institutions and the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, government and other relevant initiatives related to school meals research and learning.
		Burundi committed to finalize its school feeding impact evaluation, cost–benefit/value-for-money studies and assessment of the nutritional status of school-aged children by the end of 2025; and to mobilize stakeholders, including ministries, universities, donors and local administrations, to undertake an informed policy and funding review to implement recommendations from the studies.
 **Advocacy and partnerships commitments**	This category calls for commitments around high-level advocacy that aim to elevate the profile of school meal programmes, highlighting their multisectoral benefits at national, regional and global levels.	**Honduras** committed to strengthening partnerships with international development organizations, multilateral organizations, the UN system, civil society, academia and the private sector, aiming to increase the financial and technical support needed to implement its national school meal programme.
		Suriname committed to having at least two relevant ministers and two relevant experts represent the country in School Meals Coalition ministerial meetings and to advocate for healthy, nutritious meals in the region.

Several member states also explicitly outline their ambitions to work with the School Meals Coalition's global initiatives and partners, leveraging expertise, data and innovative financing mechanisms to overcome challenges and accelerate progress.

Nearly half of the governments that have submitted national commitments expressed their commitment to regional and international engagements, highlighting countries' dedication to peer-to-peer support and (South-South triangular) cooperation. For instance:

- **Uganda** committed to participating and engaging in regional and global School Meals Coalition activities to share experiences and learn about best practices.
- The **United States** has shown commitment to working with Coalition members, building on contributions and lessons learned from the U.S. McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, to help ensure that every child is well nourished and receives a quality education.

Children play football in a refugee camp in Chad. World Vision/Amy Van Drunen



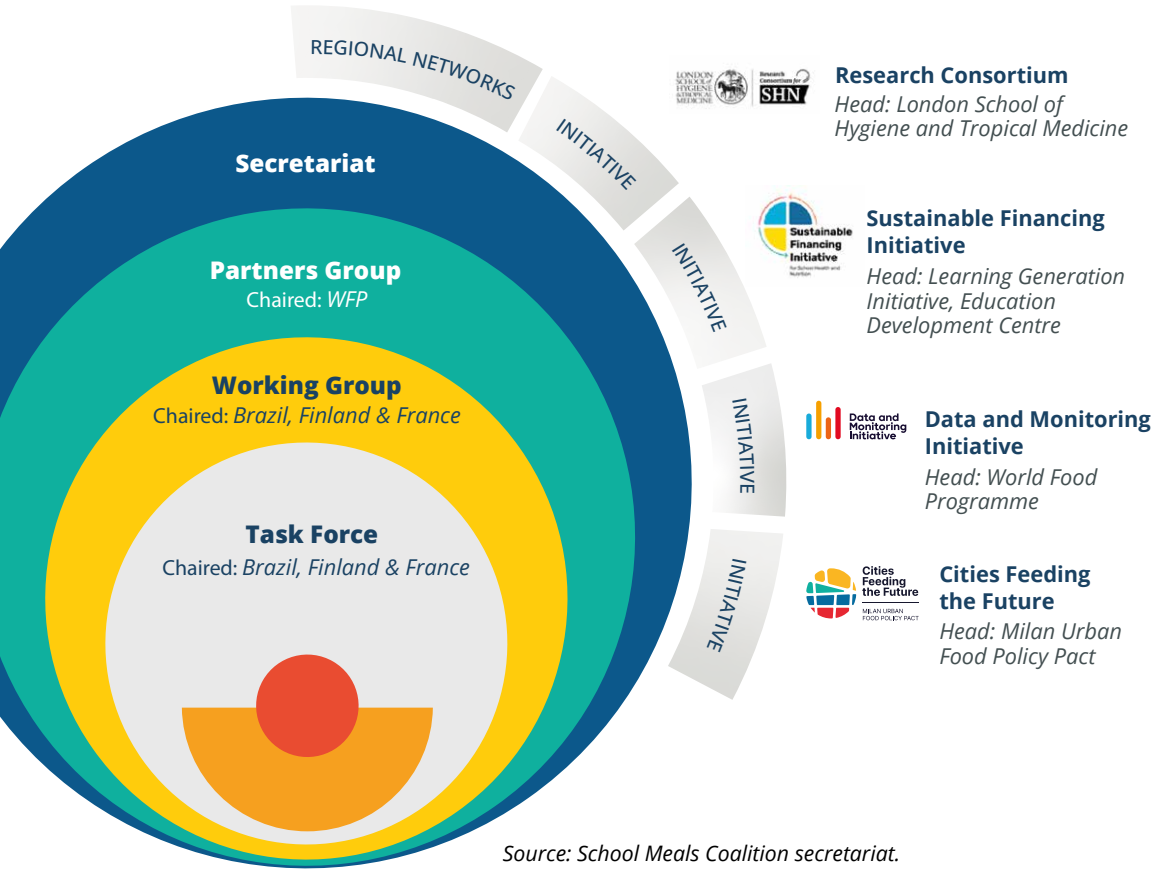
2.2 A new collaborative model: how the School Meals Coalition works and its networks

A commonly used definition of the word “coalition” is: an alliance of different states, organizations or people who agree to act together to achieve something. Another interesting definition is: a group that is formed to undertake an enterprise beyond the resources of any one member. Both definitions are useful to define the School Meals Coalition.

The School Meals Coalition is a voluntary, collaborative partnership framework created by governments, for governments, in which they share good practices, optimize cooperation and support each other to scale up their school meal efforts.

At the global level, the School Meals Coalition has three main bodies and a secretariat that make up its nimble and flexible structure. The Coalition also includes four initiatives that support countries, which are themselves vast networks of partners and countries (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4
How the School Meals Coalition works



Source: School Meals Coalition secretariat.

The School Meals Coalition Task Force is led by the Coalition co-chairs (currently Brazil, Finland and France) on a rotational basis, and is made up of focal points from each of the leading member countries. The Task Force is the Coalition's decision making body: it determines the Coalition's overall strategic direction; sets yearly priorities; provides guidance and leadership to the work of the secretariat and the initiatives; and leads on political advocacy and positioning. Current members of the Task Force are: the African Union, Brazil, Finland, France, Guatemala, Honduras, Japan, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, Sweden and the United States. The Task Force meets virtually every two months and in person at the ministerial level every other year. The inaugural meeting took place in Helsinki in October 2022 and the second took place in Kenya in October 2024. These ministerial meetings serve as crucial opportunities to endorse the Coalition's priorities for the biennium (see Box 2.1 for more details on the Ministerial Task Force Meeting in 2024 and the Coalition's priorities).

Box 2.1
The Second Ministerial Meeting of the School Meals Coalition's Task Force

The Second Ministerial Meeting was hosted by the Kenyan government and took place in Nairobi, Kenya on the 29 October 2024.

Participants included all 12 members of the task force and special invitees from Norway, the Rockefeller Foundation, Novo Nordisk Foundation, the Global Partnership for Education, the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank.

H.E. Dr William Samoei Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya, delivered the keynote address, furthering Kenya's commitment to scaling school meals to reach 10 million children by 2030.

During the meeting, the task force endorsed six priorities for the School Meals Coalition for 2025–2026, which were outlined in the resulting Outcome Statement:[11]

1. **Make school meals a political and fiscal priority globally and expand access to sustainable finance:** Advocate for school meals as a high-impact investment in human capital and growth, identify a set of influential champions, engage ministers of finance in this discussion and engage international financial institutions at the highest levels to address the challenges of positioning this agenda as a global priority. Help countries explore options to mobilize domestic and external finance to expand fiscal space, fill funding gaps and transition to self-reliance. Strengthen the Sustainable Financing Initiative to lead on this priority and ensure robust collaboration with the Global Alliance Against Poverty and Hunger.

2. **Move from commitments to action at country level:** Encourage countries to accelerate the scale and quality of their school meal programmes by connecting them with suitable partners, providing assistance and fostering peer-to-peer engagement. Support the launch of the new initiative of the School Meals Coalition to provide demand-led, strategic technical assistance to low and lower-income countries for sustainable, national programmes.

[11] *Leaders Statement Kenya TF Meeting 29 October 2024_29.10.24 final pub.pdf*

3. **Strengthen evidence for better decision making and more cost-efficient programmes:** Document best practices and the value for money of sustainable national school meal programmes, and inform government policy decisions through the annual Research Statement and Showcase of Evidence produced by the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition.

4. **Measure results and report on the Coalition's progress:** Support the launch of the biennial *State of School Feeding Worldwide* report which summarizes global progress; report on the new SDG 4 indicator on school meals coverage and strengthen indicators to measure progress on school meals at the global level through the new Coalition database; and enhance the availability and accessibility of high-quality data on financing, national school meal programmes, school meals in urban contexts and complementary activities through the Data and Monitoring Initiative.

5. **Empower cities and municipalities to make progress:** Prioritize support at the subnational level, through the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative, mobilizing a cohort of champion mayors/subnational leaders to improve their programmes through targeted support, sharing of experiences and advocacy.

6. **Prioritize high-level participation in the next Global Meeting of the School Meals Coalition in Brazil in 2025 and support additional gatherings to promote advocacy:** These gatherings include South Africa's G20 Presidency, Canada's G7 Presidency, the 10th Africa Day of School Feeding, Second Food Systems Stocktaking Moment, Nutrition for Growth Summit in Paris, Summit of Social Development/United Nations General Assembly, COP 30 and regional School Meals Coalition meetings.

The Working Group: The School Meals Coalition's Working Group is the larger and fully inclusive forum that encompasses all the Coalition's member countries. The working group is co-chaired by Finland, France and Brazil, and is a broad platform for information-sharing; dissemination of best practices and country experience; establishment and mobilization of further partnerships and alliances between countries and with other partners; and sharing of expertise and institutional support. Coalition members meet virtually every two months and every other year at the ministerial level through the School Meals Coalition Global Summits. The first Global Summit was organized in France in 2023 (see Box 2.2 for more details on the Paris Global Summit). The second global summit will take place in Brazil in 2025.

Box 2.2
First School Meals Coalition Global Summit

The first School Meals Coalition Global Summit was hosted by France in October 2023 in Paris, under the high patronage of the President of the French Republic.

The summit marked the first convening of all Coalition members and presented an opportunity to showcase the mobilization and commitments of governments in favour of school meals. It aimed to align global action and collectively set ambitious objectives for the years to come.

Bringing together high-level political leaders from 66 countries, four regional bodies and 65 partner organizations, the summit marked a pivotal moment for global school meals advocacy. Notable attendees included the President of Honduras.

The event reaffirmed the shared conviction that school meals are a driver of economic, social and environmental progress by supporting goals in education, food security, nutrition, health, social protection, gender equality, agrifood systems and climate action.

During the event, countries, regional bodies and partners presented their past and future efforts and the meeting saw an array of announcements, commitments and outcomes, including:

- Brazil was welcomed as third co-chair of the Coalition alongside Finland and France.
- Nine new member states and partners were welcomed to the Coalition.
- The Coalition's Cities Feeding the Future Initiative was launched.
- More than 100 CSOs, led by Plan International and World Vision International, issued a Joint NGO Call to Action on School Meals for adequate funding, strong nutrition standards and independent accountability.

The meeting also served as a launching pad for the School Meals Coalition's engagement in 2024 and beyond. It culminated in an *outcome statement*, signed by the Coalition's three co-chairs, Brazil, Finland and France.

The next Global Summit of the School Meals Coalition, hosted by Brazil in September 2025, will build on the momentum of the 2023 Summit and continue to drive collective action towards ensuring that every child has access to a healthy meal in school.

For more information on the event, to view the recordings and to read the full summit report, visit the School Meals Coalition's website: School Meals First Global Summit *(schoolmealscoalition.org)*

The Partners Group is chaired by WFP and encompasses all School Meals Coalition partner organizations. Similar to the working group, this is a broad forum for information-sharing, mainly at the technical level. The partners group meets virtually every two months.

The secretariat is hosted by WFP through augmented capacity in its School Meals & Social Protection Service at WFP headquarters in Rome. The secretariat serves as the School Meals Coalition's coordinating body, with strategic guidance from the task force. The secretariat helps to articulate how the Coalition ecosystem works, including through outreach to new members; organizing periodic meetings and events; keeping stakeholders informed, empowered and motivated; and helping to connect initiatives and avoid duplication of efforts.

The following initiatives were established to support governments with specific needs and challenges connected to their commitments (Section 2.3 below provides more details):

- The **Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition** is hosted by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and coordinates the independent, global efforts of networks of academia, think tanks and research partners. It generates evidence on the design, cost, implementation and impact of school health and nutrition programmes; makes the case for investment; and provides policymakers within Coalition countries with policy and programmatic advice on good practice in school health and nutrition.
- The **Sustainable Financing Initiative** is hosted by the Education Development Centre and explores different ways to support countries with more sustainable sources of financing for school meal programmes. This includes stepping up domestic financing and finding ways of increasing and making funding from donors more efficient and effective.
- The **Data and Monitoring Initiative** is hosted by WFP and coordinates country and partner efforts to develop and sustain a global school meals database and better indicators to track and monitor Coalition actions and accomplishments.
- The **Cities Feeding the Future Initiative** is hosted by the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and shares good practices and knowledge from selected successful cities around the world to help other cities in Coalition countries replicate these models.

Figure 2.5

The School Meals Coalition ecosystem: Multisectoral collaboration from local to global



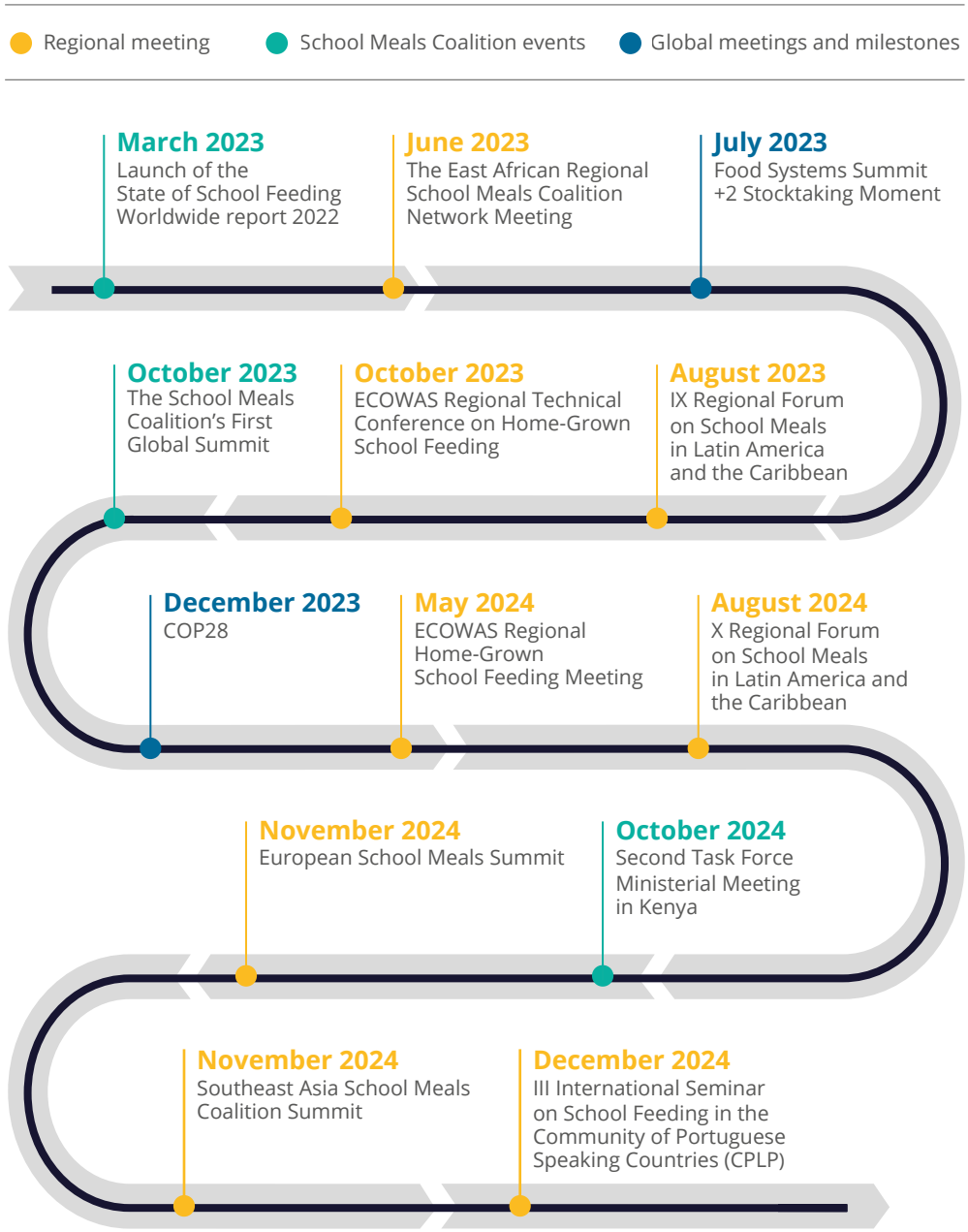
Disclaimer: This visualization is for illustrative purposes only and does not capture all aspects of the School Meals Coalition. The Coalition is rapidly evolving, so the information shown may become outdated at the time of publication.

The School Meals Coalition is designed to maximize the ways countries and partners interact with each other; share information, resources and capacities; and through these connections make progress at various levels. In 2023 and 2024, more than 5,000 people participated and helped shape Coalition-related virtual and in-person events, which have further expanded networks and communities of practice. Approximately 110 governments and regional bodies, and 116 partners have been mobilized through various events, which in turn helps to shape public discourse and develop consensus. Figure 2.6 shows the main Coalition-related events that have taken place over the past two years.



WFP Executive Director, Cindy McCain, joins Ministers and other leaders of the School Meals Coalition at the Second Ministerial Meeting of the Task Force of the Coalition in Nairobi, Kenya, 2024.
WFP/Edwin Nyamasyo

Figure 2.6
School Meals Coalition key events 2023–2024



Through the advocacy efforts of the School Meals Coalition's members and partners, school meals are now recognized in major global fora, such as COP 28, the G20 – including the Global Alliance Against Poverty and Hunger championed by Brazil's G20 Presidency – the G7, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the UN General Assembly. Table 2.2 shows the declarations and statements issued by the School Meals Coalition and its members, and also the broader discussions the Coalition has helped to influence.

Table 2.2
Declarations issued or influenced by the School Meals Coalition in 2023–2024

2023	*8th Africa Day of School Feeding Communiqué*
	Empowering the future: ECOWAS homegrown school feeding for human capital development and economic growth
	G7 Miyazaki Agriculture Ministers' Communiqué (2023)
	Paris Statement – First School Meals Coalition Global Meeting
	G20 New Deli Leaders Declaration (2023)
	COP 28 UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action (2023)
2024	*High-Level Political Forum: Ministerial Declaration*
	Declaration of the Member Countries of the School Meals Coalition: Tenth Regional Forum on School Meals in Latin America and the Caribbean 2024
	Pescara G7 Development Ministers' Meeting Communiqué
	The Global Education Meeting: Fortaleza Declaration
	School Meals Coalition Task Force Meeting Outcome Statement
	The Global Alliance Against Hunger & Poverty: Policy Basket on School Meals
	U20 Rio/ Sao Paulo Communiqué
	G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration
	Outcome Statement: Southeast Asia School Meals Coalition Summit
	III International Seminar on Best Practices in School Feeding within CPLP - Final Communique

To reach and engage with its diverse international community, the School Meals Coalition uses various communication platforms to help countries connect and learn from each other. The Coalition's *website*, relaunched in September 2024, is a hub for global data, research and government actions and has attracted over 24,000 views from 183 countries. The Coalition's mailing list includes subscribers from all member countries, partners and various global, regional and local stakeholders. The mailing list facilitates the dissemination of a monthly newsletter, which now includes 20 editions. Highlights of the work undertaken by countries and partners are shared through social media channels, which saw an 80 percent increase in followers in 2024.

One of the significant developments over the last few years has been how the Coalition has evolved at the regional level. Engagement with regional and subregional bodies has strengthened, expanding from two to six members. Since 2023, regional bodies have organized and hosted eight regional events in four continents, including approximately 80 countries and nearly 800 participants. These events resulted in four regional declarations or statements, which have fed into global discussions (see Table 2.3 for a summary of regional efforts).

Regional efforts offer a valuable platform for countries to exchange best practices, learn from one another's experiences and foster cooperation. By connecting countries within shared geographic, linguistic or economic contexts, these events reinforce and amplify the impact of national commitments, enabling more coordinated and effective efforts.

Table 2.3
Summary of regional efforts

Event	Participants, governments and partners	Main outcomes	Declaration/ Outreach document
2024			
III International Seminar on Good Practices in School Feeding in the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP), São Tomé and Príncipe	43 participants from eight countries and four partners	Resulted in the CPLP joining the School Meals Coalition and saw the establishment of a CPLP Network on School Feeding, Nutrition and Health as a space for regular multilateral dialogue.	*III International Seminar on Best Practices in School Feeding within CPLP - Final Communique*
Southeast Asia School Meals Coalition Summit, Siem Reap, Cambodia	134 participants from seven governments and 39 partner organizations	Major financial commitments were announced, along with efforts to develop sustainable financing mechanisms (such as blended finance and climate finance) to support scalability and long-term sustainability. Cambodia committed to integrating school meals into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) framework, ensuring its long-term impact as a regional priority. The Philippines was announced as the host of the next regional summit.	*Outcome Statement: Southeast Asia School Meals Coalition Summit*
European School Meals Summit, Kyiv, Ukraine	88 participants from 24 countries and 14 partners	Positioned school meals as a tool to bridge social divides, build sustainable food systems and drive human capital development. Participants pledged to establish data-driven frameworks and mobilize technical and financial support across national and regional levels. Six Ukrainian municipalities (Kropyvnytskyi, Zhytomyr, Brovary, Zaporizhzhia, Sheptytskyi and Ivano-Frankivsk) joined the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and the School Meals Coalition's Cities Feeding the Future Initiative.	n/a

X Regional Forum on School Meals in Latin America and the Caribbean, Mexico City, Mexico, 2024	131 participants from 24 countries and 31 partners	Highlighted comprehensive public policies as key to sustainable school meal programmes. Cemented the region's recognition of school meals as a crucial instrument for improving nutrition and to support climate resilience and sustainable food systems.	*Declaration of the Member Countries of the School Meals Coalition: Tenth Regional Forum on School Meals in Latin America and the Caribbean 2024*
2024 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Stocktaking conference on Homegrown School Feeding, Dakar, Senegal	128 participants from 21 governments and 25 partners	Discussions focused on the financing of costed commitments to home-grown school meals. Saw launch of "ECOWAS Homegrown School Feeding landscape analysis paper".	n/a
2023			
ECOWAS Regional Technical Conference on Homegrown School Feeding, Dakar, Senegal	More than 70 participants from 14 countries	Saw the launch of the Western African regional network. Resulted in ECOWAS joining the Coalition.	*Empowering the future: ECOWAS homegrown school feeding for human capital development and economic growth*
The Power of Multisectoral Approaches to Human Capital Development, IX Regional LAC Forum, Brasilia, Brazil	200 participants from 25 Latin American countries, and partners from international financial institutions, regional organizations, international cooperation organizations, UN agencies, academia and the private sector	Saw the launch of The *State of School Feeding* in Latin America and the Caribbean 2022 report.	*State of School Feeding in Latin America and the Caribbean 2022*
The East African Regional School Meals Coalition Network Meeting, Kigali, Rwanda	39 participants from nine countries and eight partners	Saw the launch of the Eastern African School Meals Coalition Network.	n/a

2.3 The School Meals Coalition in action: addressing challenges through global initiatives

The School Meals Coalition has established four initiatives designed to support countries and partners with specific challenges or needs. The initiatives are themselves networks of partners and amplify the scope, reach and power of the Coalition. Since the launch of the Coalition in 2021, the initiatives have collaborated with around 48 governments and supported exchanges between approximately 100 cities.

The Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition

Objectives

The Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, launched in 2021 as the first Coalition initiative, was established in response to a call from member states for access to evidence-based policy insights on the most effective approaches to national school meal programmes. To this end, the Research Consortium's objectives are to: (i) curate and analyse evidence on the costs and effectiveness of school meal programmes for learning, cognition, social and physical outcomes, to clarify the case for investment; and (ii) translate the evidence into policies and actions which decision makers and parliamentarians can use to develop or strengthen efficient national programmes.

How it works

The Research Consortium adopts a deliberately global approach to evidence gathering and dissemination, seeking to ensure that research is developed through a truly international dialogue and is relevant to different national settings.

To achieve this, the Research Consortium co-created a Global Academy of more than 1,100 academics and practitioners from approximately 330 organizations across 110 countries. The research of these academicians is produced through six thematic communities of practice – groups of researchers specializing in discrete areas of school health and nutrition – established to respond to the evidence gaps identified by School Meals Coalition member states.

The Research Consortium also liaises with existing regional and country knowledge hubs to co-create contextually relevant evidence and guidance for Coalition member states. For example: in Africa, through the African Nutrition Society and Federation of African Nutrition Societies; in Asia, through the ASEAN network and the Indian Nutrition Society; in Europe, through the European Union Child Guarantee; in Latin America, through the RAES Sustainable School Feeding Network; and in North America, through the National Institutes of Health. This approach fosters a two-way exchange of knowledge between the Consortium and its stakeholders, where global expertise informs local practice, and insights from on-the-ground experiences shape the broader research and policy agenda.

The work of the Research Consortium is guided by a ten-year research strategy designed to support the School Meals Coalition's goal of ensuring every child has access to a nutritious meal in school by 2030. It is coordinated by a small secretariat hosted at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. The secretariat plays a key role in coordinating global research collaborations and translating data into actionable guidance for policymakers, practitioners and stakeholders across sectors.

Areas of research focus

The Research Consortium has created six communities of practice to guide research into evidence and policy, with a seventh area under development.

The *Impact & Evidence* Community of Practice carries out systematic reviews of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of school meal programmes, assessing their impact across several outcomes, including learning, physical and cognitive growth, and psychosocial well-being. This included a Cochrane Database systematic review[12] into the impact of school meals on child well-being, the first of its kind in almost 20 years.

The *Analytics & Metrics* Community of Practice conducts national value-for-money analyses of Coalition member states' school meal programmes, estimating the likely returns on investment for governments across four key sectors: health, education, social protection and agriculture. Studies are under way with 14 governments, including eight in sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, the outcomes of the study resulted in a government commitment to expand its national school meal programme from 10 million to 20 million children; in the Philippines, the study is being used as the basis for rethinking the design of the national school meal programme.

[12] More information about the Cochrane Database systematic review can be found *https://www.cochranelibrary.com/*

The *Good Examples* Community of Practice produces case studies of national programmes, conducted by local research and policy teams using a standardized template. The *Good Examples* Community of Practice aims to complete case studies for all 108 Coalition member states to document how programmes are organized and to identify good practices. There are currently case studies published or under way in 55 countries worldwide. Case studies are also useful for planning programmes in individual countries: for example, in Ukraine, a *Good Examples* case study helped to inform the strategy developed by the national School Nutrition Reform team to reach vulnerable children in Ukraine during the conflict.

The *Nutrition* Community of Practice engages with regional networks of nutrition experts, including the African Nutrition Society, the Federation of African Nutrition Societies, the Indian Nutrition Society and the UK Nutrition Society, to promote understanding of the importance of continued investment in child nutrition beyond the "first 1,000 days" of life, throughout the "next 7,000 days" into childhood and adolescence. It is also collaborating with partners as part of the Coalition's Data and Monitoring Initiative to identify, for the first time, a common set of nutrition indicators for school-aged children.



In Nepal, a solar energy system powers meal preparation in school. WFP/Biplob Rakhal

The *Planet-Friendly Diets* Community of Practice drives innovation in school meals for improving planetary health, working with Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda to co-create policy-relevant insights. This included the creation of a toolbox to assist the creation of costed plans to help Coalition member countries integrate planet-friendly menus, reduce food waste, optimize clean and energy efficient cooking, and engage in meaningful food education.

The *Food Systems* Community of Practice is actively working to evaluate different pathways for school meals to transform food systems, including through agrobiodiversity, women's empowerment and the promotion of micronutrient rich crops, helping Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal to transform local agriculture through sustainable school meal programmes.

A seventh community of practice, led by partners in Brazil and focusing on the use of artificial intelligence to support programme design, is under development.

A cross-cutting priority across all research areas is the inclusion and cultivation of the talent of early career researchers.

Achievements since publication of the State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022

Since its launch, the Research Consortium has emerged as a hub for school health research and dialogue, publishing more than 30 papers in leading journals; producing a pioneering evidence-based white paper on the relationship between school meals, food systems and climate resilience; developing three Annual Research Statements distilling evidence for Coalition member states; and contributing to global publications such as the Lancet Commissions, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report and the World Bank's Disease Control Priorities. In addition to its contributions to the literature, the Research Consortium has also directly supported School Meals Coalition countries to gain deeper insights into their national programmes. National case studies have either been published or are under way in 55 countries, spanning all income levels, and value-for-money studies have been published or are under way in 14 countries, eight of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.

A key responsibility of the Research Consortium is to ensure research outputs are communicated to school health and nutrition stakeholders. To date, its Global Academy has hosted more than 40 virtual events, attracting over 4,000 experts from more than 100 countries. Members of the Research Consortium have also been invited to speak at over 60 national, regional and international events hosted by other partners, including governments and supranational political unions such as the African Union and European Union. Every October, ahead of the School Meals Coalition Ministerial Meeting, the Research Consortium holds its Annual Showcase, engaging a broad audience (including policymakers, academia, development agencies and civil society). The 2024 Annual Showcase drew an audience of more than 600 participants from 75 countries. To further reach key audiences, the Research Consortium partners with the FAO School Food Global Hub to cross-promote key publications, and with the Inter-Parliamentary Network for Education to share useful research and guidance with parliamentarians.



A teacher in a classroom in Sri Lanka.
World Vision/Elissa Webster

The Sustainable Financing Initiative

The School Meals Coalition's Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition is led by the Learning Generation Initiative at the Education Development Centre.

Objectives

The initiative was officially launched in 2022 to work with governments and development partners to help countries identify multi-year financing opportunities for school meal programmes, with a particular focus on low and lower-middle-income countries. Achieving universal coverage of school meal programmes in these countries would generate multiple benefits for education, health and human development. The Sustainable Financing Initiative's aim is to identify the financing pathways to unlock those benefits. The initiative has a three–pronged approach to achieving its objectives: Synthesizing Evidence to Inform Policy and Investment (ANALYZE); Supporting Countries to Develop Sustainable Financing Strategies (ACT); and Making School Meals a Political and Fiscal Priority (AMPLIFY).

Synthesizing evidence to inform policy and investment (ANALYZE)

During 2023–2024, the Sustainable Financing Initiative deepened its research on financing school meals and explored linkages with broader initiatives, such as food system reform. Research outputs included an analysis of donor financing for school meals; technical notes on debt relief, climate finance and hydrocarbon taxation; and a wide-ranging analysis of innovative financing options for school meals. The analysis highlighted the potential role of "sin taxes" on sugar sweetened beverages, ultra-processed foods, alcohol and tobacco in financing healthy diets for children delivered through school meal programmes.

Building on earlier analysis, the Sustainable Financing Initiative also led a major study exploring the cost of accelerating progress towards the goal of universal coverage of school meals, combining a global overview with evidence from national programmes. Across its analytical work, the Sustainable Financing Initiative has a strong focus of equity and financing for children who have been left behind, and in placing school meals within wider food system reform strategies.

Such research informs the development of country strategies and helps to situate school meals in the wider SDG agenda. Recent publications by the Sustainable Financing Initiative include:

- In July 2023, *School meal programmes: A missing link in food systems reform* (Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition, 2023) to influence the 2023 UN Food Systems Summit Stock Take and position school meals as a unique opportunity to improve food systems, climate change adaption and education outcomes.
- In May 2024, *School Meals International Donor Analysis*, highlighting under-investment in school meals by donors and the need for better data and transparency in reporting systems.
- In October 2024, with ODI Global, *School Feeding and the Sustainable Development Goals: An agenda to combat child hunger, boost education, transform food system and strengthen equity* (Watkins et al., 2024) making the case for expanding school meal programmes in low and lower-middle-income countries, the Sustainable Financing Initiative presented two scenarios with associated cost estimates and financing options for governments.
- In December 2024, the Sustainable Financing Initiative published a paper on innovative finance, drawing on technical notes on debt swaps and debt relief, climate finance and earmarked taxes (Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition, 2024a).

Supporting countries to develop sustainable financing strategies (ACT)

Using research findings, the Sustainable Financing Initiative works at country level with government members of the School Meals Coalition, WFP, donors, local consultants and other key stakeholders committed to expanding national school meal programmes and transitioning towards country ownership and domestic financing sustainability. The Sustainable Financing Initiative's *"Offer of Services"* and accompanying methodology provide governments with practical tools to develop sustainable financing strategies for school meals. A new online platform, currently being developed, will make these resources available as a global public good.

The Sustainable Financing Initiative's approach is to work collaboratively with governments to estimate the full costs of their school meal programmes (and possible areas for efficiencies); develop strategies (with a focus on equity); allocate existing funding; and identify gaps.

The initiative explores options for closing funding gaps from domestic resources, the transition funding required and options from donors or multilateral development banks. It can also explore additional funding from the private sector, philanthropy funding and untapped resources, e.g. through linkages with local agriculture and climate financing.

Since the Sustainable Financing Initiative, in partnership with WFP, provided initial finance strategy support to Rwanda in 2023, demand for country support has increased rapidly, with requests from governments, WFP country offices and regional bodies such as the Southern African Development Community. In response, ten additional country financing strategies are currently under way or under discussion, including:

- **Sierra Leone:** The Sustainable Financing Initiative is helping to expand the Integrated Home-Grown School Feeding Programme towards universal coverage. Following a funding gap estimation, the Sustainable Financing Initiative supported the government with a fiscal space analysis, which identified available funding. Based on this, a financing strategy is being developed, outlining key pathways for financing the school meal programme, including by exploring improved governance of national resources to generate revenues or establishing a national school meals fund.
- **Ghana:** The Sustainable Financing Initiative is assisting in identifying the full cost of implementing Ghana's School Feeding Strategy, estimating funding gaps and developing a financing strategy. To promote cross-sectoral dialogue and foster engagement around financing, a technical working committee and steering committee were established comprising the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Food and Agriculture; Ministry of Education; and the Ministry of Local Government and Decentralization.

Making school meals a political and fiscal priority (AMPLIFY)

One of the Sustainable Financing Initiative's core research objectives is to inform public policy and drive changes aimed at expanding access to high-quality school meal programmes. This involves working with a high-level steering committee comprised of country and development partner representatives, and engagement with a wide array of actors, including national governments, multilateral development banks, UN agencies and others. The Sustainable Financing Initiative contributes to advocacy and communications efforts via social media, newsletters and high-level speaking events.

The Sustainable Financing Initiative's work under the "AMPLIFY" stream has greatly expanded over the past two years, including with the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty established under the Brazil Presidency of the G20, to position school meals as a central priority. Engagement with the World Bank led to a commitment to increase financing for school meals. In November 2024, the Sustainable Financing Initiative partnered with ODI Global to co-host a global dialogue framed around the joint report *School feeding and the Sustainable Development Goals: An agenda to combat child hunger, boost education, transform food systems and strengthen equity* (Watkins et al., 2024). The event brought together policymakers and thought leaders – including from the World Bank, International Food Policy Research Institute, Sierra Leone, among others – to explore how school meals can serve as a focal point for international cooperation and a catalyst for food system transformation, linking food and climate justice agendas. The Sustainable Financing Initiative also contributed technical knowledge to the Brookings 17 Rooms project under Room 2, and the 2024 G20 in Brazil, including the *2030 Sprint for School Meals.*

The Data and Monitoring Initiative

Objectives

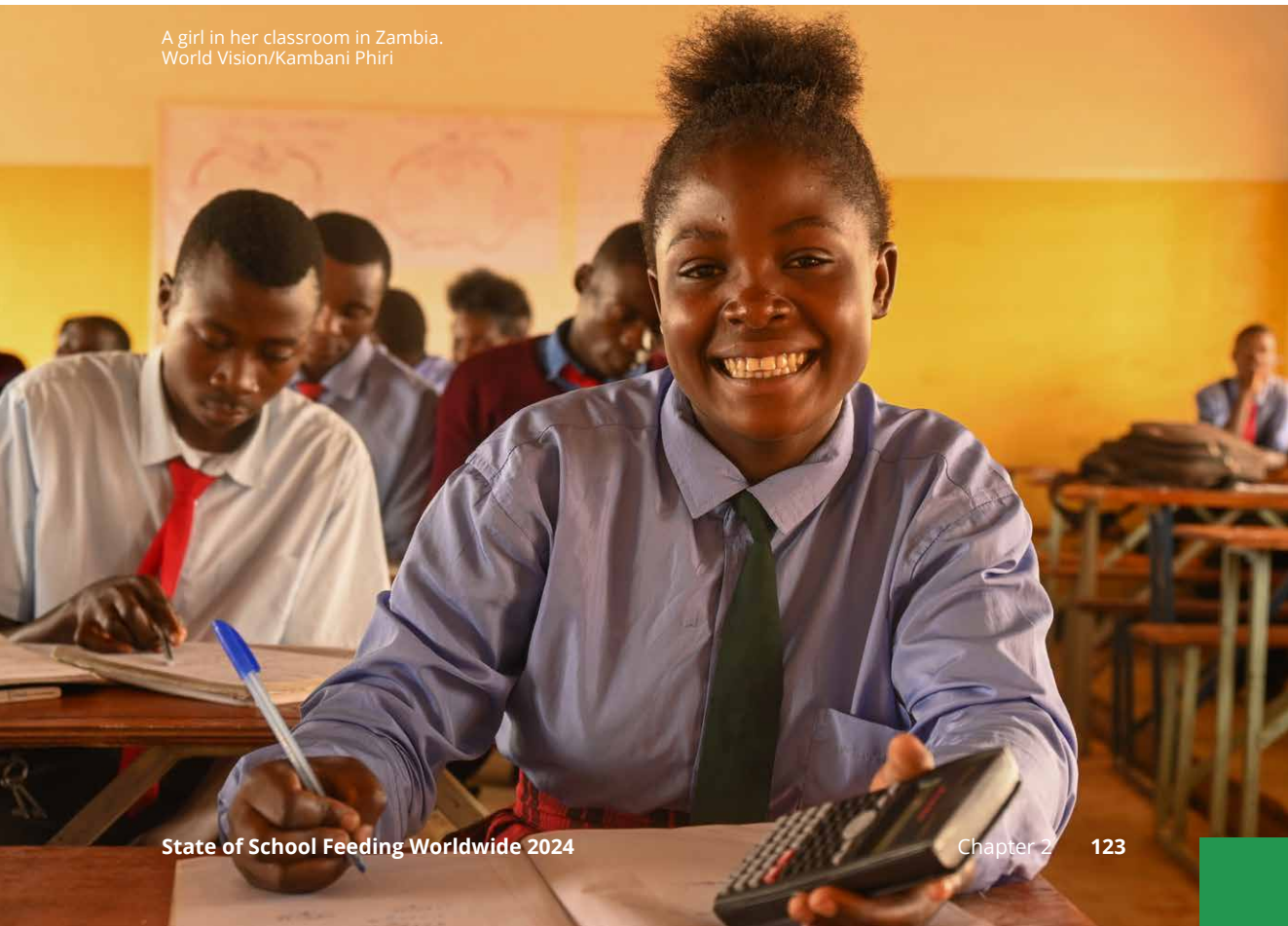
The Data and Monitoring Initiative, led by WFP, was launched in response to a call from School Meals Coalition member states to address the critical lack of harmonized data on school health and nutrition. Globally, data on school-aged children and national school meal programmes remain fragmented, inconsistently collected and poorly aligned across sectors, undermining governments' ability to assess coverage, track progress or design effective policies.

The central aim of this initiative is to improve the availability, accessibility and use of data on national school meal programmes, thereby promoting evidence-based actions for school-aged children. High-quality data enables stakeholders to identify gaps, guide research, support policymaking, track outcomes and improve programme quality and cost-effectiveness.

To meet this goal, the Data and Monitoring Initiative pursues four main objectives:

- Define and promote a core set of global indicators for school meals, with clear methodologies and guidance, to support standardized data collection and use by governments worldwide.
- Propose a new global indicator under SDG 4 to measure school meals coverage, positioning school meals as a key driver of quality education.
- Develop and maintain a global school meals database as a trusted public good, ensuring that data are consistently stored, shared and accessible to stakeholders across countries and sectors.
- Support national governments to collect, validate and report high-quality school meals data, strengthening their capacity to design and implement effective programmes.

Over time, the Data and Monitoring Initiative aims to serve as the global reference point for reliable, comparable and policy-relevant data on school meals.



A girl in her classroom in Zambia.
World Vision/Kambani Phiri

How it works

The Data and Monitoring Initiative is coordinated by WFP and governed by a multi-stakeholder steering committee composed of experts from governments, UN agencies, academic institutions and CSOs. To achieve its objectives, the initiative and its partners collaborate through two technical working groups:

- The **Indicators Working Group** brings together diverse stakeholders to identify a core set of indicators for monitoring school meals and related domains, including education, health, nutrition, food systems and WASH. This includes a dedicated set of indicators on the nutritional quality of school meals, addressing a critical evidence gap. The group has also developed and submitted a proposal for the inclusion of a school meals coverage target and indicator under the SDG 4 (Quality Education) framework.
- The **Database Working Group** is developing a global repository to serve as a trusted public good, ensuring that data on school meals and complementary programmes are systematically compiled, stored and made accessible to stakeholders worldwide. The database consolidates data from key sources, including the GCNF surveys, *State of School Feeding Worldwide* reports, the World Bank, African Union and the School Meals Coalition and will continue to expand its functionalities.



A boy fills his water bottle in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
World Vision/Didier Nagifi Sademok

The Data and Monitoring Initiative works closely with a range of complementary initiatives both within and beyond the School Meals Coalition ecosystem, such as the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative and the Healthy Diets Monitoring Initiative to ensure strategic alignment, foster synergies and prevent duplication.

Achievements

Since its launch, the Data and Monitoring Initiative has established itself as a key actor in the School Meals Coalition ecosystem, driving forward a harmonized global data architecture for school meals. It has regularly convened a diverse group of technical experts across governments, UN agencies, academia and civil society, and has completed a comprehensive review of over 250 indicators across 11 conceptual frameworks. This led to the development of a set of core indicators to guide national monitoring and global reporting on school meals and the initiative is currently incorporating indicators on complementary topics, including education, health, nutrition, food systems and WASH.

A major milestone has been the development of a global school meals coverage indicator under the SDG 4 (Quality Education) framework. Responding to the School Meals Coalition's 2022 Leaders' Declaration, the Data and Monitoring Initiative led a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process to design a rigorous methodology. The proposal was formally submitted and presented to the UNESCO Education Data and Statistics Commission and has gained significant support among member states. Its adoption will represent a landmark recognition of school meals as a national policy agenda (see Chapter 1, Box 1.1 for further details).

In July 2024, the Data and Monitoring Initiative launched the first iteration of the Global Database on School Meals,[13] presented during a joint webinar with the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, attended by 117 participants from over 40 countries. The database integrates data from multiple global sources and is continually updated and refined in alignment with the endorsed core indicators. In collaboration with the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative, the Data and Monitoring Initiative is integrating data from cities and municipalities into the database, recognizing the central role of local governments in the implementation of school meal programmes and enhancing the granularity of school meals data.

[13] *https://www.schoolmealscoalitiondatabase.wfp.org/*

Another important workstream in partnership with the Research Consortium focuses on providing users with access to the latest, most relevant publications and evidence on school meals and complementary interventions.

The Data and Monitoring Initiative has also initiated discussions with partners on how to provide technical support to governments in integrating the core indicator set into national monitoring systems. This work aims to offer guidance on indicator selection and alignment with existing data systems, strengthening country ownership, fostering collaboration and enhancing the reporting mechanisms for national data on school meals.

The Cities Feeding the Future Initiative

Objectives

The Cities Feeding the Future Initiative – led by the *Milan Urban Food Policy Pact* (secretariat) – was launched in October 2023 with the goal to improve school meal programmes by strengthening relationships between and among local and national governments. The initiative aims to connect city policies on school meal programmes with the goals of national governments and regional and global agendas. It takes a multidisciplinary approach, recognizing the health, environmental and social impacts of school meal programmes and their reliance on the local areas where schools operate. The Cities Feeding the Future Initiative has three main objectives, to:

- empower the role of cities in implementing school meals;
- facilitate knowledge-sharing among cities and global actors; and
- support decision making processes at the local level.

How it works

Cities are central to setting up and managing school meal programmes that truly meet local needs, as they can facilitate community feedback and turn residents' needs into practical actions.

The Milan Pact works with more than 300 cities, representing around 500 million inhabitants, making it the largest network of cities focusing on urban food systems worldwide. The Milan Pact is supported by partners ranging from international organizations to universities, research centres and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Within the Milan Pact, more than 65 percent of cities provide school meals, making it a very relevant topic on which to share best practices and exchange knowledge.

The objectives of the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative are advanced through three main areas of action and related activities:

I. **Advocacy:** This includes working with champion mayors who lead by example in shaping effective school meal programmes, and organizing national and regional dialogues to influence governments and partners.

Exceptional examples of the Milan Pact's champion mayors who have played a leading role in school meal programmes are:

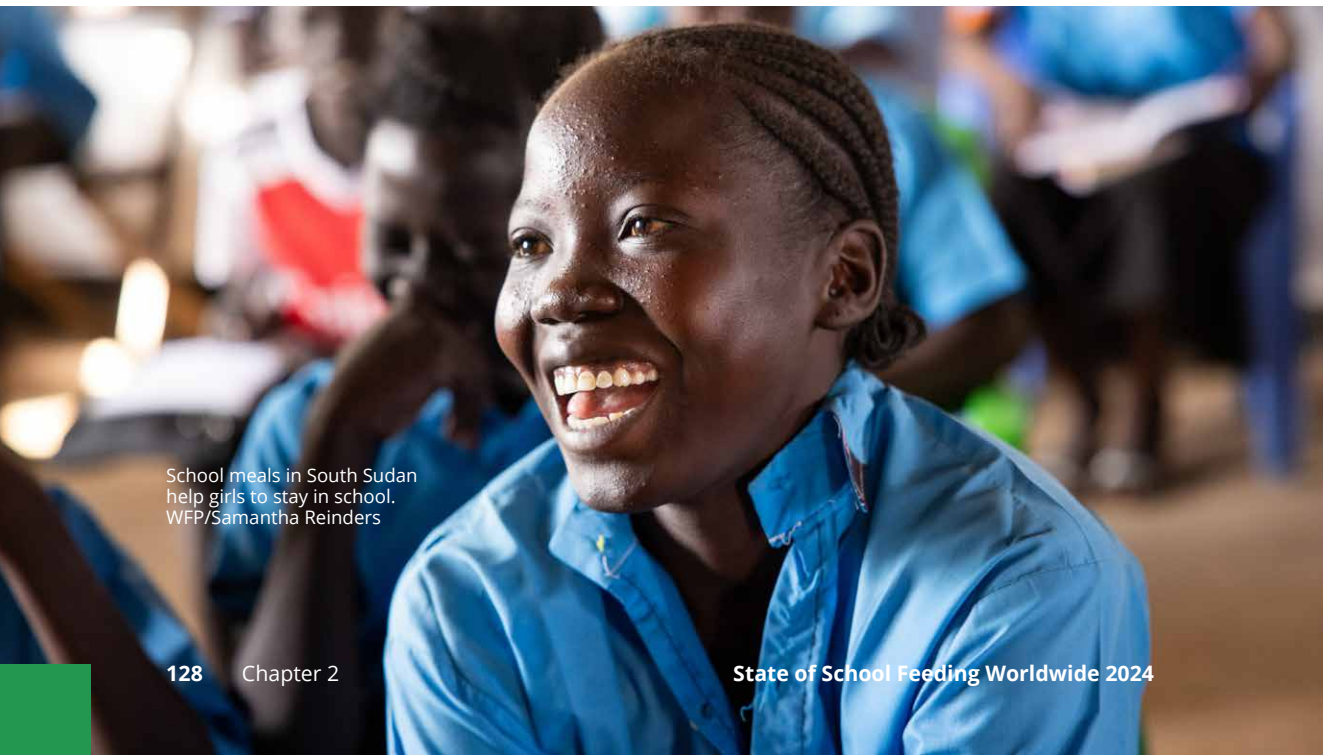
- *Chadchart Sittipunt, Governor of Bangkok*, who established a school canteen policy to offer free breakfast and lunch for children in 437 schools in the city. The city has also made a strong contribution in showcasing best practices on school meals in the region. For this reason, in 2024, the city hosted the 2nd Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Asia Pacific Regional Forum titled "Nourishing growing cities: enhancing school meals and supporting local communities".
- *Adanech Abiebie, Mayor of Addis Ababa*, who initiated a school meal programme in the city, which now operates in 255 institutions, benefiting 801,000 students. This commitment resulted in the city hosting the 6th Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Regional Forum in Africa in 2024 entirely dedicated to school meals. The forum provided a platform for dialogue, collaboration and knowledge exchange among African cities.
- *Sakaja Arthur Johnson, Governor of Nairobi*, who designed a sustainable school meal programme for all public primary schools and early childhood development learners to guarantee access to a high-quality, nutritious meal.
- *Giuseppe Sala, Mayor of Milan*, who has shown a unique dedication to improving school meals in the city, by guaranteeing adequate and sustainable meals to 83,000 children. He has also actively engaged in key international events on the subject, including the 58th Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank, where he highlighted the critical role of investing in school meal programmes for advancing shared development goals.

II. **Sharing of best practices:** Collection of data to complement the School Meals Coalition's database to gather best practices and specific learning needs on school meal programmes from signatory cities to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. Best practices are disseminated by hosting technical workshops for cities and global experts (see section 1.8 in Chapter 1).

III. **Research:** Advancing research is essential for success. The Cities Feeding the Future Initiative conducts feasibility studies to co-design successful school meal programmes using a participatory approach. It also provides technical support to help cities set up the necessary infrastructure for strengthening their school meal programmes (see Chapter 3 on how the initiative drives research with cities).

Since its launch, the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative, together with key partners, has created multiple opportunities across the globe for cities to engage and learn from each other. Among other efforts, the initiative has mobilized more than 200 representatives from more than 30 cities during Milan Urban Food Policy Pact events and regional fora (see Table 2.4 for examples of events organized by the initiative).

Specifically, since 2023, the city of Milan itself has hosted 55 city delegations to exchange good practices on school meal programmes. Study visits comprised field trips, workshops and seminars, delivering comprehensive insights into Milan's school meal system. Each study visit covered a set of context-specific interests from cities, which guaranteed a targeted learning programme. Recently, a subset of the hosted city delegations has been supported in developing structured feasibility studies, with technical guidance on implementing school meal programmes. Case study 3 provides a deeper dive into innovations championed by the city of Milan.



School meals in South Sudan help girls to stay in school. WFP/Samantha Reinders

Table 2.4

Events organized by the School Meals Coalition's Cities Feeding the Future Initiative

Event	Participants, governments and partners	Declaration/ Outreach document
"The Power of Public Food Procurement for School Meals", Copenhagen	Around 100 participants from several cities and partner organizations	*Report_The-power-of-public-food-procurement_light.pdf*
6th Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Regional Forum for Africa "School Meals Programmes for Healthier and Sustainable African Cities", Addis Ababa	Around 50 participants from 14 cities and several partner organizations	*REPORT-MUFPP-Regional-Forum-Addis-Ababa.pdf* *ENG_Summary-of-Agreement-and-Ways-Forward-3.pdf*
2nd Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Asia Pacific Regional Forum, Bangkok "Nourishing Growing Cities: Enhancing School Meals and Supporting Local Communities"	Around 70 participants from 17 cities and several partner organizations	*2nd-MUFPP-Asia-Pacific-Regional-Forum_Report_Final.pdf*
Summer School "Spreading Experiences and Knowledge on School Meals Programmes in ASEAN Cities", Bandung In partnership with ASEAN and supported by the Parahyangan Catholic University and the Municipality of Bandung, funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.	Gathered 80 participants from 30 cities in 8 ASEAN member states	*Report of the School Meals Summer School in ASEAN Cities*

Case study 3

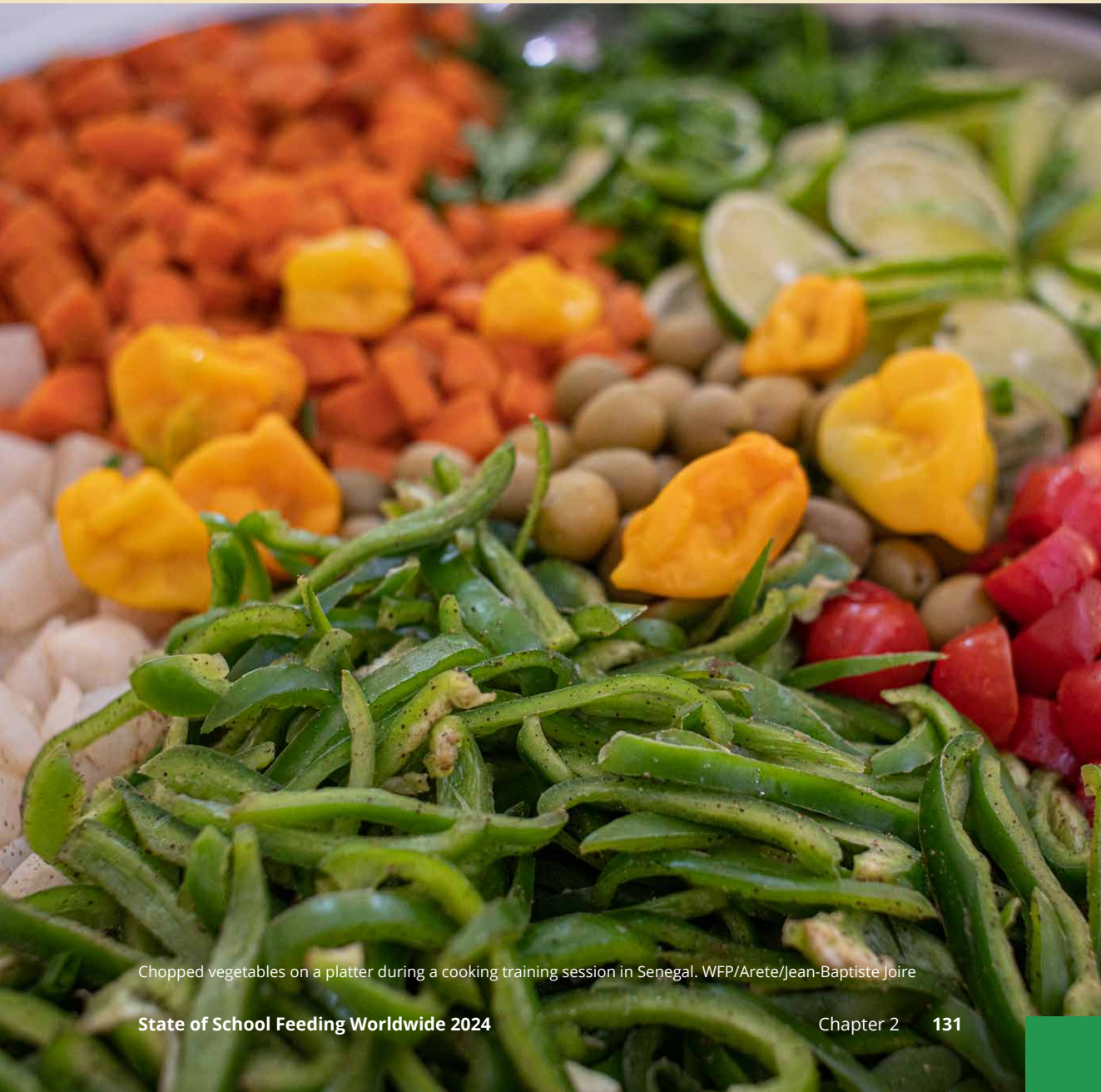
How Milan is leading the way in school meals innovation

Milan offers a valuable case study in the evolution of school meal programmes globally. Initiated by a City Council Resolution in December 1900, Milan's school meal programme has since become a main driver for reaching the ambitious objectives of the Milan Food Policy. The service is managed by the municipal agency for school canteens – Milano Ristorazione – created to provide children with "healthy, good, educational and fair" meals. Milano Ristorazione manages the entire school meals chain, designing seasonal menus in collaboration with nutrition experts and overseeing the sourcing of raw materials, prioritizing quality, sustainability and supply chain traceability. The agency produces 83,000 meals daily, thanks to 24 kitchen centres and more than 80 internal kitchens.

Each age group has a dedicated menu structure based on the Nutritional Recommended Intake Level for the Italian population. Two distinct four-week seasonal menus are prepared for the summer and winter seasons. A typical meal is generally composed of a first dish, a second dish, a side dish, bread and fruits. Cooking methods are selected to ensure that the meal is tasty and nutritious, encouraging oven steam cooking and excluding fried dishes. The combination of different colours in recipes, the adoption of local and seasonal ingredients, the introduction of recipes linked to the Milanese gastronomic culture and the rotation of a variety of ingredients are particularly encouraged. To meet the needs of children with food-related specific health conditions or who have specific diets for ethical/religious reasons, a large set of special menus are also included. Milan has promoted a significant protein transition, including a massive reduction of animal-based foods and an increase in legumes and organic options. In 2015, Milan joined the Cool Food Pledge initiative to monitor the impact of menus, leading to a 36 percent reduction in food-related greenhouse gas emissions in 2024.

Milano Ristorazione uses public procurement as a key tool to influence and guide suppliers towards more sustainable and inclusive practices. It has adopted a supplier selection system in which procurement criteria go beyond price, placing strong emphasis on technical and quality standards. As a consequence, 26 food products are sourced within a 70 km radius of the city.

Finally, the city has worked extensively on the development of educational materials for children and families to improve awareness of food consumption and reconnect them with the production of food. As an example, families and children regularly receive menu leaflets accompanied by information on the cooking methods used, the seasonality of ingredients and the overall environmental impact of each daily meal. A dinner menu proposal, complementary to the school lunch menu, is also offered to families. Parent and teacher engagement is supported through the establishment of School Meals Committees to improve students' eating environment.



Chopped vegetables on a platter during a cooking training session in Senegal. WFP/Arete/Jean-Baptiste Joire

2.4 The School Meals Coalition in action: partners powering progress

The School Meals Coalition unites more than 140 partners from civil society, academia, think tanks, foundations, UN agencies and international financial institutions. Partners' support to governments ranges from research and evidence building to advocacy, technical assistance and implementation, and is transforming the global school meals landscape.

The importance of partners' work is also highlighted in countries' national commitments, many of which explicitly reference how they will work with the Coalition's global initiatives and partners to enhance their efforts.

This section highlights how various partners are engaging with each other as well as with governments and the School Meals Coalition.

Civil society organizations – amplifying voices, enhancing school meals globally

Civil society organizations (CSOs), including national and international NGOs, research and academic institutions, community groups and foundations, are essential partners in the School Meals Coalition, strengthening government-led school meal programmes through advocacy, technical support and implementation. By leveraging their expertise, fostering collaboration and mobilizing resources, CSOs enhance national school meal programmes. Their contributions span national, regional and global levels, enabling best practice exchanges and networks that help scale sustainable programmes. Over 80 CSOs are currently School Meals Coalition partners, up from around 30 at the Coalition's inception in 2021.


eat right. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation
ASAL
ACTION AGAINST HUNGER
ACTED
AGA KHAN FOUNDATION
AKSHAYA PATRA
Alliance Bioversity CIAT
A.D.E.T.
AFI
Arla FONDEN
AUDA-NEPAD
AVSI
BREAD FOR THE WORLD
Breakfast CLUB of Canada
bgc East Scarborough
BCI
C40 CITIES
THE COALITION LA COALITION
care
CRS
Health Science and Law
cesc
CHARITY RIGHT
CHEFS IN SCHOOLS
THE CHEFS' MANIFESTO
CHIDDO
CHILDREN'S INVESTMENT FUND FOUNDATION
cirad
COMIDA DO AMANHÃ
Comune di Milano
CLEAN COOKING ALLIANCE
CBS
COUNTERPART INTERNATIONAL
DEEP POVERTY NETWORK
DNSV
Dubai Cares
EAT
EDUCATION CANNOT WAIT
EFA EDUCATION COALITION
educo
Egyptian FoodBank
EYEliance
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
CIELO MEX
food4education
FOODINSIDER.IT
FOOD FOR THOUGHT
ForAfrika
Fundesplai
gain
GBVS
global child nutrition foundation
Global Communities
Global Health Advocacy Incubator
GPE
GrowAsia
GRAÇA MACHEL TRUST
HarvestPlus
ICLEI
IFAD Investing in rural people
FSR
INRAE
IDB
INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIP
ASIK
INSTITUTO COMIDA E CULTURA
L'INSTITUT agro
International Diabetes Federation
ILRI
CGIAR
International Parliamentary Network for Education
INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE
CGIAR
IRRI
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
IRD
IsDB Islamic Development Bank
KITCHEN
the Learning Generation
LIFE THRU SPORTS
LONDON SCHOOL OF HYGIENE & TROPICAL MEDICINE
SHN
Malteser International
mary's meals
MercyCorps
MTE
Northumbria University NEWCASTLE
nourishing schools
novo nordisk fonden
national education union
UNIVERSITY of GREENWICH NRI Natural Resources Institute
OPEC FUND
OSAA
OXFAM
Pacific School Food Network
PCD The Partnership for Child Development
PATH
L'éducation de qualité pour tous
PLAN INTERNATIONAL
proveg International
RESOLVE TO SAVE LIVES
rikolto
The ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION
SĂRBĂTOAREA GUSTULUI
Save the Children
Scaling Up NUTRITION
Civil Society Network
SCHOOL FOOD MATTERS
sightandlife
SENDEC
SNV
so they can
SOLIDAR MED
SpeakUpAfrica
SUSTAINABLE ENERGY FOR ALL
TAFI
AfricaRice
The Global FoodBanking Network
THE NGO IFF
THE POWER OF nutrition
TOM
UN Nutrition
unesco
unicef
UNCDF unitlife
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FOOD SYSTEMS FOR THE FUTURE
VDSKC Verband deutscher Schul- und Kitacaterer e.V.
WAR child
WFP United Nations World Food Programme
World Health Organization
STEM GLOBAL
THE WORLD BANK
WorldFish
World Vegetable Center
World Vision
WWF

At the 2023 School Meals Coalition Global Summit in Paris, over 100 CSOs issued a Joint Call to Action, coordinated by World Vision International, Plan International and the International Parliamentary Network for Education. The call to action urged governments to honour their commitments and donors to increase investments in school meals, particularly in low-income and conflict-affected countries. The advocacy gained traction at global fora such as COP 28, the G20 and the UN High-Level Political Forum.

World Vision International has been instrumental in coordinating CSO efforts within the School Meals Coalition. As a driving force behind the call to action, World Vision International galvanizes CSOs by aligning interventions with global processes and ministerial meetings, ensuring school meals remain central in global discussions.

CSOs have driven efforts nationally and regionally, fostering multi-country collaboration and cross-sectoral dialogue, as well as bringing local perspectives to the table (communities and schools) through regional events and various processes, including:

- **Africa:** At a 2024 ECOWAS meeting in Senegal, CSOs guided discussions on home-grown school meal models, influencing commitments from seven governments. In Kenya, World Vision International convened over 40 organizations to share experiences and integrate their efforts to support governments in programmes, operations, advocacy and communications across the region.
- **Asia:** CSOs met with government leaders from South-East Asian nations, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, in a special regional summit to collaborate in identifying coherent and integrated cross-sectorial policy priorities, crucial for school meals implementation and localization success.
- **Latin America and the Caribbean:** At a regional meeting in Mexico, CSOs engaged 26 countries on sustainable school meals, integration of local farmers and climate resilience.

At the 2024 United Nations General Assembly, CSOs such as World Vision International, BRAC, Hungry for Action, SDG 2 Action Hub and Ação da Cidadania, partnered with WFP and the G20 Chair, Brazil, to highlight the transformative role of school meals in low-income and conflict-affected countries.

Through their work, CSOs position school meal programmes as solutions to challenges such as gender inclusivity, economic development, social protection and food security. By addressing gaps and providing expertise, they ensure these programmes are sustainable, resilient and impactful, enhancing lives and strengthening communities.

Box 2.3

CSOs – Food 4 Education driving innovation and implementation

In Kenya, Food 4 Education is transforming school nutrition with a bottom-up approach to ensure no child is hungry at school. Starting in 2012 with a single kitchen serving 25 students, in 2024 the organization provided nutritious meals to over 450,000 children across 1,263 schools.

But its impact extends beyond meal provision. Food 4 Education is building a scalable model for school meal programmes across Africa by:

- Designing a replicable blueprint for school meal programmes.
- Operating at scale to refine and demonstrate the model's success.
- Supporting governments to adapt and implement the approach in their own contexts.

Food 4 Education's operations are powered by data and technology, including the innovative Tap2Eat system — tech-enabled wristbands linked to digital wallets. This system streamlines parental payments, tracks meal delivery and reduces food waste. The organization also prioritizes local sourcing: 80 percent of ingredients come from the kitchen's local region, and 100 percent of commodities are Kenyan grown, boosting local economies and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Food 4 Education works closely with government partners, exemplified by its 2023 collaboration with the Governor of Nairobi to roll out county-wide school meals.

The organization's vision for 2027 is ambitious: reaching 1 million children in Kenya and supporting at least two additional African governments to replicate the model – ultimately impacting an additional 2 million children across the continent.

Food 4 Education's work blends innovation, community engagement and public-sector collaboration, illustrating the pivotal role of CSOs in driving sustainable solutions for school meals.

Box 2.4
Advocacy in action – The CSO-led path to Canada's School Food Programme

After decades of advocacy and coalition building, and thanks to the tireless efforts of the Coalition for Healthy School Food and its partners, the Government of Canada made the historic decision to fund a National School Food Programme and published its National School Food Policy in 2024. Founded in 2014, the Coalition for Healthy School Food – representing organizations across every province and territory in the country – united hundreds of groups, including school food NGOs, academics, school boards, municipalities and health agencies around *eight shared guiding principles* (Coalition for Healthy School Food, 2018; Hernandez et al., 2018).

Through the #NourishKidsNow campaign, members of the Coalition for Healthy School Food engaged policymakers, particularly gathering public support after the programme was listed as an unfunded commitment in the 2019 Federal Budget. A standout moment of the campaign was a teacher's 200-lap run on Parliament's lawn in 2023, symbolizing the US$144 million[14] annual funding promise made in 2021.

Collaboration with researchers was pivotal in the movement's success. Sponsored by the Arrell Family Foundation, Dr Amberley T. Ruetz's report, *The Economic Rationale for Investing in School Meal Programs for Canada: multi-sectoral impacts from comparable high-income countries*, presented compelling evidence of the programme's benefits, including a 2.5x–7x return on investment in human health and economic benefits in comparable high-income countries.

[14] Exchange rate at the time of writing 1 Canadian Dollar= 0.72 U.S. Dollars.

Key pieces of evidence that the Government of Canada found most persuasive were the sections detailing cost savings for families; school meals increasing students' future earnings; agrifood sector economic development and job creation; and the impact of increasing mothers' labour-market participation. A draft of the report was strategically shared with policymakers and fellow researchers before it was finalized to identify gaps while government departments were planning their federal budget proposals. This iterative approach ensured the report was tailored to address policymakers' questions and was best positioned to make the investment case for school meals.

In 2024, the government committed US$720 million over five years to expand access to school meals to 400,000 more children annually – a historic step towards ensuring every child has access to healthy food at school.

Collaboration with researchers, CSO leadership, strategic evidence sharing and sustained advocacy were key drivers of this historic progress, highlighting the power of collective action to nourish Canada's children.

UN agencies – partnering for health, nutrition and learning

Leaders of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO) all joined the School Meals Coalition at its launch. In a joint declaration, they committed to working together to help governments set priorities, make commitments and implement plans. These agencies provide operational support, policy advice and technical guidance to the Coalition. They also push for better data collection and analysis, increased investment and higher-quality services to support children's healthy development and education.

The "Stepping up effective school health and nutrition" partnership – led by UNESCO, and including the Global Partnership for Education, the UN Nutrition Secretariat, the World Bank Group and the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition – works to scale up effective, integrated policies and programmes. By bringing together experts from different sectors, this group helps countries develop practical, integrated approaches that connect education, health and nutrition.

Building on commitments from the 2022 Transforming Education Summit and the 2023 global status report *Ready to learn and thrive: School health and nutrition around the world* (UNESCO et al., 2023), the inter-agency group continues to champion health, nutrition and well-being as integral to quality education. A key milestone was the 2024 Global Education Meeting in Fortaleza, Brazil – the first to highlight cross-sectoral approaches to transformative education with a focus on student well-being.

In 2024, a UNICEF–WFP collaboration in Eastern and Southern Africa resulted in three country case studies (Malawi, South Sudan and Zimbabwe) that demonstrate collaboration in action for school-aged children and adolescents. UNICEF and WFP are working together with governments in these countries to provide school meals, nutrition services, clean water and sanitation, creating healthier learning environments for thousands of children (UNICEF & WFP, 2025).

To bridge the gap between national ambitions and practical implementation, UNESCO and its partners are developing tools to help countries integrate health and well-being into their education sector plans. A briefing note for policymakers outlines why this is essential and how governments can make use of such resources. A forthcoming handbook will provide practical guidance on sector analysis, joint reviews, programme design, implementation, costing, budgeting and monitoring.

In 2025, FAO and WFP presented a methodology and guidance package to design, implement and monitor data-driven and context-specific nutrition guidelines and standards for school meal programmes. The methodology has already been used to develop guidelines in Cambodia and Ghana (for more information on testing for nutritionally optimal school meals in Cambodia, see Box 3.2).



In Somalia, a girl enjoys her school lunch. WFP/Mahad Said

International financial institutions – driving investments in school health and nutrition

At the Second Ministerial Meeting of the School Meals Coalition's Task Force, held in October 2024, in Nairobi, Kenya, task force members, along with special guests such as the African Development Bank and Islamic Development Bank, emphasized the importance of coordinated efforts and sustainable investments to elevate school meals as a global, fiscal and political priority. International financial institutions are essential partners in expanding and sustaining school meal programmes, addressing the financial and operational challenges often faced by governments. While international financial institutions have shown increasing interest in supporting school meals, further efforts are needed to enhance coordination and optimize the financial resources available to governments. Several international financial institutions have launched initiatives that contribute to school meals financing, but there remains significant potential for more strategic, large-scale and sustained investments.

Among the international financial institutions making tangible contributions, the African Development Bank and Children's Investment Fund Foundation have recently partnered to establish the End School-Age Hunger Fund, with an initial commitment of US$50 million from the Children's Investment Fund Foundation. This initiative aims to provide a mix of grants and concessional loans to support pilots in an initial ten African countries to expand their school meal programmes to reach 10 million vulnerable children, supporting governments in their long-term vision of achieving universal school meals coverage by 2030. The fund is expected to catalyse further financing and drive a more structured investment approach in Africa.

The Islamic Development Bank and WFP are advancing school meals financing through the Nutritious Start: Human Capital Development Initiative. This initiative aims to increase financial support for nutrition and school meal programmes in member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Under the Human Capital Development Initiative, WFP has committed to raising US$5 million per year in grants, while the Islamic Development Bank will complement these efforts with concessional and non-concessional financing up to three times this amount to expand nutrition activities and school meals coverage. The initiative aligns with broader development goals to enhance nutrition, improve educational outcomes and foster long-term human capital growth.

International financial institutions are also supporting home-grown school meal programmes, which emphasize local procurement to enhance economic resilience and sustainable food systems. This focus is reflected in national and regional discussions. For instance, in West Africa, ECOWAS together with the African Development Bank facilitated commitments from seven governments to expand and enhance home-grown school meal programmes and emphasized the importance of robust policy development, sustainable financing and enhanced collaboration within government sectors and partners to strengthen the overall impact and sustainability of home-grown school meal initiatives. The World Bank's 2023 Evolution Roadmap, its Global Challenge Programme for Food and Nutrition Security and commitments under the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty underscore the potential of home-grown school meals in advancing food security and social protection through multisectoral approaches. Collaboration with key partners such as the Global Agricultural and Food Security Programme and Global Partnership for Education – where WFP was accredited as a Global Partnership for Education grant agent this year – has also been pivotal. Translating this momentum into action requires stronger direct investment, closer alignment with national strategies and expanded collaboration with partners to scale home-grown school meal programmes in a sustainable manner.

Through the School Meals Coalition's Sustainable Financing Initiative, international financial institutions have a unique opportunity to champion sustainable investment frameworks that align with government priorities and their financial commitments to school meals. Stronger engagement from international financial institutions in this area could drive the advancement of innovative financing solutions – such as debt swaps for school meals and climate-linked funding mechanisms – while fostering fiscal space for governments to scale these programmes sustainably and effectively over the long term.

Looking ahead, the growing engagement from new partners, such as the Asian Development Bank, offers a pivotal opportunity to enhance the reach and impact of government-led school meal programmes, showcasing powerful examples of multilateral collaboration in action.

2.5 Way forward: paving the way for universal school meals

The Second Ministerial Meeting of the Coalition's Task Force in Nairobi marked a pivotal moment for the School Meals Coalition, defining a clear, collective road map for 2025–2026 (see Box 2.1). The way forward is shaped by the six priorities endorsed by the task force. The Coalition's next phase will focus on putting these commitments into action with greater ambition and coordination.

A central priority will be positioning school meals as a cornerstone investment in human capital and economic growth. This means scaling up political advocacy, engaging ministers of finance and international financial institutions. The Sustainable Financing Initiative will play a central role in these efforts, supporting countries in mobilizing domestic and external resources for sustainable, nationally owned programmes.

The School Meals Coalition will also continue to accelerate support at country level – facilitating technical assistance, knowledge exchange and strategic partnerships to scale up national programmes. The new initiative of the School Meals Coalition will be instrumental in this work, ensuring demand-driven support for low and lower-income countries to develop sustainable and effective national school meal systems.

Evidence and accountability will remain at the heart of the School Meals Coalition's mission. Through the Research Consortium, the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* reports and the new global database on school meals created by the Data and Monitoring Initiative, the Coalition will improve access to actionable data and share insights on programme impact, cost-efficiency and innovation.

Recognizing the importance of subnational leadership, the Coalition will also continue to deepen its engagement with cities and municipalities through its Cities Feeding the Future Initiative, mobilizing local leaders and ensuring cities and municipalities inform regional and global dialogues.

Looking ahead, the School Meals Coalition will leverage global platforms to amplify its advocacy, including key events such as South Africa's G20 Presidency and COP 30 in Brazil. These gatherings will be strategic in terms of galvanizing high-level support and fostering collaboration among member countries.

With a clear vision and strengthened collaboration, the School Meals Coalition stands ready to transform shared commitments into lasting impact to ensure sustainable, impactful and inclusive school meal programmes as a cornerstone of development.



A girl with her mother, who supplies crops for school meals in Cambodia.
World Vision/Dara Chhim, Ben Adams, Elissa Webster

Case study 4

Brazil's school meals revolution: a global example for fighting hunger, supporting farmers and driving international cooperation

Brazil's school meal programme dates from the 1950s, when the School Meals Campaign was launched. Since then, it has evolved into one of the largest and most innovative programmes in the world. Now known as the National School Feeding Programme (PNAE), it is managed by the National Fund for Education Development, a federal agency linked to the Ministry of Education. Through a decentralized delivery model, the programme provides nutritious meals to around 40 million students in approximately 150,000 public schools, ensuring that all children and adolescents in the 5,570 municipalities are fed on all 200 school days of the year.

The provision of universal school meals was enshrined in Brazil's 1988 constitution as part of the fundamental right to food. In 2009, implementation of school meals was transformed with the enactment of the School Feeding Law, which requires that at least 30 percent of the food purchased for the programme comes directly from family farmers, preferably from Indigenous Peoples, communities of people of African descent (known as quilombola) and formal or informal women's groups. The National School Feeding Programme also pays premiums of up to 30 percent for certified organic or agroecological products. These measures help Brazil integrate more native, nutrient-rich and biodiverse foods into school meals, while strengthening local food systems.

Brazil's National School Feeding Programme has become a global model of success, inspiring countries around the world. It demonstrates how school meals can be tailored to meet the specific needs of traditional populations, such as quilombolas and Indigenous Peoples. The programme also excels in fostering stakeholder and community participation. Through its South-South cooperation initiatives coordinated by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the country has also actively promoted dialogue, capacity building and the exchange of experiences and knowledge among countries. Brazil's technical cooperation has particularly advanced the home-grown school meals agenda across Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa.

One successful regional initiative is the Sustainable School Feeding Network, known as RAES, created in 2018 by the Brazilian government and FAO. It joins 17 countries from Latin America and the Caribbean to promote school meal programmes and policy through the exchange of experiences and good practices.

Building on its long-standing international cooperation on school meals, Brazil joined the School Meals Coalition in 2021 and became one of its co-chairs, alongside Finland and France, during the first Global Summit in October 2023. In line with its national commitment to advance South-South cooperation and peer learning, Brazil's hosting of the Second Global Summit marks a milestone in strengthening international partnerships on school meals.

In 2024, during its G20 presidency, Brazil emphasized the importance of school meals in combating hunger, poverty and inequality. It launched the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, bringing the fight for zero hunger back to the forefront of the international agenda. The Alliance aims to mobilize resources, knowledge and boost global efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty. Functioning as a "network of networks", it galvanizes existing mechanisms, including the School Meals Coalition, to achieve its goals. WFP joined the Alliance as one of its founding members.

Ahead of the launch of the Alliance, the Brazilian G20 Presidency created the "2030 Sprints" to accelerate progress in the fight against hunger and poverty. As part of the "2030 Sprint for School Meals", Brazil rallied governments, multilateral development banks, UN agencies and philanthropies to reach 150 million more children by 2030 in low-income and lower-middle-income countries.

Centre of Excellence Against Hunger in Brazil and Brazil's contributions to the global school meals agenda

The WFP Centre of Excellence Against Hunger in Brazil, created and supported by the Brazilian government, is a global hub for knowledge exchange, capacity development and technical assistance to help countries achieve SDG 2 on zero hunger. Over the past 13 years, in partnership with the Brazilian Cooperation Agency and the National Fund for Education Development, the Centre has engaged with over 70 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Using Trilateral South-South Cooperation, the Centre showcases successful experiences in developing and strengthening school meal and social protection programmes, while promoting nutrition and rural development practices.

This approach draws on lessons learned from Brazil and other countries from the global south to multiply knowledge and policy innovations among developing countries. With a focus on school meals and their links to local agrifood systems, nutrition and climate resilience, the Centre supports national governments in designing, improving, expanding and running nationally owned school meal programmes.

Since its creation, inspired by Brazilian practices, the Centre has directly contributed to the swift advance of the school meals agenda worldwide: 52 delegations from developing countries have visited Brazil to learn from its cross-cutting school meals experience. As a result, over 30 countries increased their investments in national school meal programmes, and 20 countries have strengthened their regulatory or legal frameworks.

The Centre's partnership with the African Union led to the creation of the African Day of School Feeding – a continent-wide commitment to invest in school meals – and the establishment of the home-grown school meals cluster within the African Union. Countries such as Togo, Senegal and Malawi have received support to enhance their national policies; while in Kenya, the Centre contributed to development of the National School Health and Nutrition Strategy.

These examples highlight the Centre of Excellence's role in providing tailor-made solutions; advocating for sustainable policies and programmes; and facilitating mutual learning across an expanding network of partners. With deep expertise in school meals, smallholder farming and policy development, the Centre of Excellence is at the forefront of innovation and global policy dialogue for school meals.

Case study 5

Somalia's bold vision for education through its school meal programme

Amid decades of conflict and instability, Somalia is turning to school meals as a powerful tool to rebuild its education system and invest in human capital. Despite this commitment, poverty, conflict and climate shocks have left Somalia ranked lowest on the Human Development Index[15] and more than 3 million children are out of school.[16]

School meal programmes are a critical tool to address these challenges, as they offer both educational and nutritional support to vulnerable children. During the 2021–2023 drought, 250 schools closed;[17] however, schools with school meal programmes were significantly more resilient, remaining operational and keeping children engaged in learning.

Launched in 2003, Somalia's school meal programme started with just 4,000 children. By 2023, with international support, the programme had grown to reach 197,000 children, 47 percent of whom were girls. However, funding gaps and Somalia's reliance on external donors threaten the sustainability of the school meal programme. Recent reductions in donor contributions led to a significant drop in programme coverage in 2024.

A pivotal step in advancing school meals came in 2021 when Somalia joined the School Meals Coalition, committing to the Coalition's goals to improve education and foster long-term human capital growth. In 2022, the Somali government outlined three ambitious goals as part of its national commitment:

1. **Finalize and implement the National School Feeding Policy**, incorporating it into core plans such as the Education Sector Strategic Plan (2022–2026) and the subsequent National Transformation Plan (2025–2029). Since pledging this initial commitment, Somalia has finalized the National School Feeding Policy.

[15] *The 2023/2024 Human Development Report. Breaking the Gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world*

[16] *Education | UNICEF Somalia*

[17] *Drought in Somalia] | [educationcluster.net]*

2. **Establish a multisectoral coordination mechanism** involving new partners – especially the private sector – to support the programme technically and financially.
3. **Advocate for school meals** to raise awareness of their importance in enhancing education and addressing malnutrition.

School meals have become a national policy priority, well reflected in education and social protection policies. To further strengthen cross-sector coordination, Somalia held a Multisectoral Roundtable Meeting in Mogadishu in August 2023 where the Ministries of Education, Agriculture and Finance signed a Declaration of Commitment to establish inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms and develop a road map for implementing the National Home-Grown School Feeding programme.[18] In September 2023, these ministries endorsed a national vision to provide school meals to all public primary schoolchildren by 2030, marking a milestone towards a self-sustaining, government-led programme.

In early 2025, the Ministry of Education finalized the National School Feeding Policy, and efforts are ongoing to support its nationwide dissemination.

To secure essential financial and technical support, Somalia co-hosted a National School Feeding Programme Donor Conference alongside Finland and France, marking one of the School Meals Coalition's first advocacy engagements at country level.[19] Following these efforts, France pledged EUR3.5 million to help restore Somalia's programme after funding drops.

Through its school meal programme and active engagement in the School Meals Coalition, Somalia is addressing immediate needs while laying a foundation for social and economic stability.

By highlighting school meals in the National Transformative Plan (2025–2029), Somalia has positioned school meals as a central pillar in its journey towards resilience and human capital development.

[18] *Government of Somalia forges partnerships to scale up school meals | School Meals Coalition*

[19] *Joint Outcome Statement: Donor conference advancing human capital through school meals in Somalia*

Case study 6

European action for school meals: Driving change at home and abroad

The engagement of 19 European countries within and outside of the EU, in the School Meals Coalition reflects the continent's commitment to ensuring children's access to nutritious meals both domestically and globally. Nations such as France, Germany, Italy, the UK and Nordic countries have long recognized the value of school meals in promoting education, health and social inclusion. Many European countries also prioritize school meals in their humanitarian and development aid. In November 2024, European countries came together for the European Regional School Meals Summit in Kyiv, Ukraine, underscoring the region's dedication to the Coalition's goals.

The European Commission joined the School Meals Coalition in 2022 and supports school meal programmes in an increasing number of countries, including Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Togo and Burkina Faso. Within the EU, the European Child Guarantee positions school meals as a key policy to combat child poverty, hunger and inequality.[20] During Spain's European Union Council presidency in 2023, the country urged member states to ensure all children have access to at least one nutritious meal on a daily basis and hosted a regional meeting to promote school meals as a strategy against child poverty and food insecurity.

Several European nations have made significant strides towards the School Meals Coalition's goals. In 2023, Germany launched the Accelerating School Meals project in support of home-grown and climate-sensitive school meals. Implemented through WFP, this five-year, EUR22 million programme is seeking to scale home-grown school meal programmes and energy solutions in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Sierra Leone. Germany has also engaged in innovative financing mechanisms to support school meals, including several debt-swap agreements with Egypt. Germany supports the Coalition's Research Consortium and Sustainable Financing Initiative and funds a WFP–FAO project that assists governments to develop nutrition guidelines for school meals (read more about the project in Chapter 3). Germany itself has had nutritional guidelines for school meals since 2008. In 2024, it adopted the "Good Food for Germany" strategy,[21] with a particular focus on children and young people.

[20] *European Child Guarantee - European Commission*

[21] *BMEL - Publications - Good Food for Germany - The Federal Government's Food and Nutrition Strategy*

Luxembourg has also made significant commitments to sustainable school meal programmes. Its Supply for the Future strategy aims to increase local and organic products in school meals and include more vegetarian options by 2025. Luxembourg has developed a digital platform to link local suppliers with school canteens, reducing food waste and plastic pollution. Since 2022, Luxembourg has been funding a three-year project to strengthen school meal programmes in fragile contexts. This project examines how school meals link to peace and social cohesion in conflict settings.

Other European countries, within and outside of the EU, are also making notable progress: Sweden has offered free school meals for over 70 years and recently launched "A New Recipe for School Meals", a project that links food system transformation with education, local resilience and public health, in four municipalities. Through its 2025 Finance Act, Denmark made a historic commitment by allocating approximately US$130 million to a multi-year pilot initiative to assess the benefits of school meals on its students' health, academic performance and well-being.

In 2024, Denmark joined forces with the Novo Nordisk Foundation, Grundfos and WFP for a three-year project supporting climate-smart, sustainable and inclusive home-grown school meal programmes in three East African countries, namely Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. Norway is funding a multi-year project to support school meal programmes across the African Union, while Iceland recently expanded its support to WFP's school meal programmes in Malawi, Sierra Leone and Uganda.

Through these diverse efforts, Europe is playing a central role in advancing the School Meals Coalition's goal of providing healthy, sustainable meals for all children.

Chapter 3
New advances in understanding school meals: innovations and sustainable programming



A student in class in Malawi.
WFP/Giulio d'Adamo

Chapter 3 highlights emerging and innovative areas of research that the editorial board considers are of potential interest to the wider school meals community. As this report is published biennially and is intended to have a shelf-life of two years, this chapter has a particular focus on work that is novel and early in its publication cycle. To enhance the accessibility of the research, studies are presented as summaries of work already published in detail in scientific and policy literature. The reader is encouraged to access the original publications for reference and more detailed follow-up. The summaries were commissioned by the editorial board and are written by the authors of the original articles, who are solely responsible for the content.

This chapter is organized into three sections: investigating new insights into returns on investment, programming practices and sustainable financing.

The first section, ***New evidence on the multisectoral benefits and returns on investment of school meal programmes***, presents new evidence from expert technical groups around the world in four separate analyses:

- A summary of value-for-money studies undertaken by the Research Consortium's "Analytics and Metrics" Community of Practice. These studies use secondary subnational-level data from countries to show that school meal programmes achieve returns across many sectors, resulting in cumulative positive returns in the range of US$1 to US$30 for each dollar spent, varying with the subregion being targeted.
- A systematic review of available trials on the impact of school meals on education outcomes, undertaken by the "What Works Hub" at the University of Oxford, which shows that the returns in terms of impact and cost–benefits are similar in scale to those found in many of the most popular education interventions.
- A summary of recent analyses of the impact of school meals on social protection outcomes, including the 2024 World Bank Working Paper *School Meals, Social Protection and Human Development: Revisiting Trends, Evidence, and Practices in South Asia and Beyond* (Bundy et al., 2024) which concludes that school meals and cash transfers are among the most ubiquitous safety nets in the world, and that each offers relative advantages in different contexts.
- An update on the results of a new series of randomized controlled trials, led by a consortium including WFP and the World Bank Group, which is confirming old insights and providing new insights into studies of national school meal programmes across multiple countries.

These analyses are enhanced by information in two boxes: the International Labour Organization's insights into school meals and social protection (Box 3.1); and an update on a new trial under way in Cambodia (Box 3.2).

The second section, ***New evidence on programming practice***, explores three aspects of programme implementation at the national level:

- A review by the "Good Examples" Community of Practice of the case studies it has conducted to date in more than 50 countries. The review highlights the emerging evidence of good practices, and describes plans for the future.
- An update from FAO and WFP on their programme, *Setting new holistic nutrition guidelines and standards for school meals*. This programme responds to a well-recognized need to set meaningful and credible nutrition standards for school meals.
- Insights from the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative on programming school meals at the municipality level. This report arises from the newest of the School Meals Coalition's initiatives, and illustrates the importance of recognizing and better understanding the role of municipalities in delivering school meal programmes.

These reports are supported by three boxes: the relevance of the SABER policy tool in programme design (Box 3.3); the continuing development of FAO's School Food Global Hub as a global good (Box 3.4); and the WHO list of Global Action for Measurement of Adolescent health (GAMA) indicators for assessing adolescent health and well-being (Box 3.5).

The third section, ***Financing a breakthrough – the role of innovative finance***, was developed by the School Meals Coalition's Sustainable Financing Initiative and provides an analysis of the multiple options available to countries to finance their national school meal programmes. This final section explores the question: What would it take to finance a breakthrough in the provision of school meals? The School Meals Coalition's goal is to ensure that every child has access to a hot school meal every school day by 2030. But translating this goal into delivery will require a step-increase in finance, both through domestic budgets and Official Development Assistance. This analysis shows how innovative financing could play an important supporting role.

3.1 New evidence on the multisectoral benefits and returns on investment of school meal programmes

This section highlights recent evidence on the returns of investments in school meals across multiple sectors. It starts with an update of results from ongoing "value-for-money studies", one of the most frequently requested areas of support from the Research Consortium, showing how a national school meal programme can provide returns in several sectors simultaneously. The returns in two very important sectors – education and social protection – will then be explored in more detail. Finally, the section provides an update on the insights emerging from new trials conducted by several countries.



In Bangladesh, students champion health checks in school. WFP/Mehedi Rahman

Value for money of national school meal programmes

To fully understand investments in school meal programmes, and the returns on those investments, it is essential to assess comprehensive costs and benefits. Cost–benefit analysis methods can be used, which document in monetary terms both the costs and benefits of rolling out a given policy. Developing cost–benefit analyses to evaluate school meal programmes can inform evidence-based policy decisions related to efficient and cost-effective financial investments; demonstrate how economic returns from national school meal programmes can be estimated across sectors; and, importantly, highlight such programmes' high policy relevance by helping to identify key distributional consequences and major equity implications, especially pro-poor and pro-female aspects (Verguet et al., 2023).

The Research Consortium's "Analytics & Metrics" Community of Practice has developed pioneering economic models to estimate the full costs and benefits of school meals across multiple sectors. A preliminary cost–benefit analysis approach was first tested on a global selection of low and middle-income countries, for which input secondary data were readily available. This high-level, global cost–benefit analysis model estimated that the benefits gained across the four sectors of health and nutrition, education, social protection and the local economy would far exceed the costs, indicating that school meal programmes could be substantially cost-beneficial (Verguet et al., 2020).

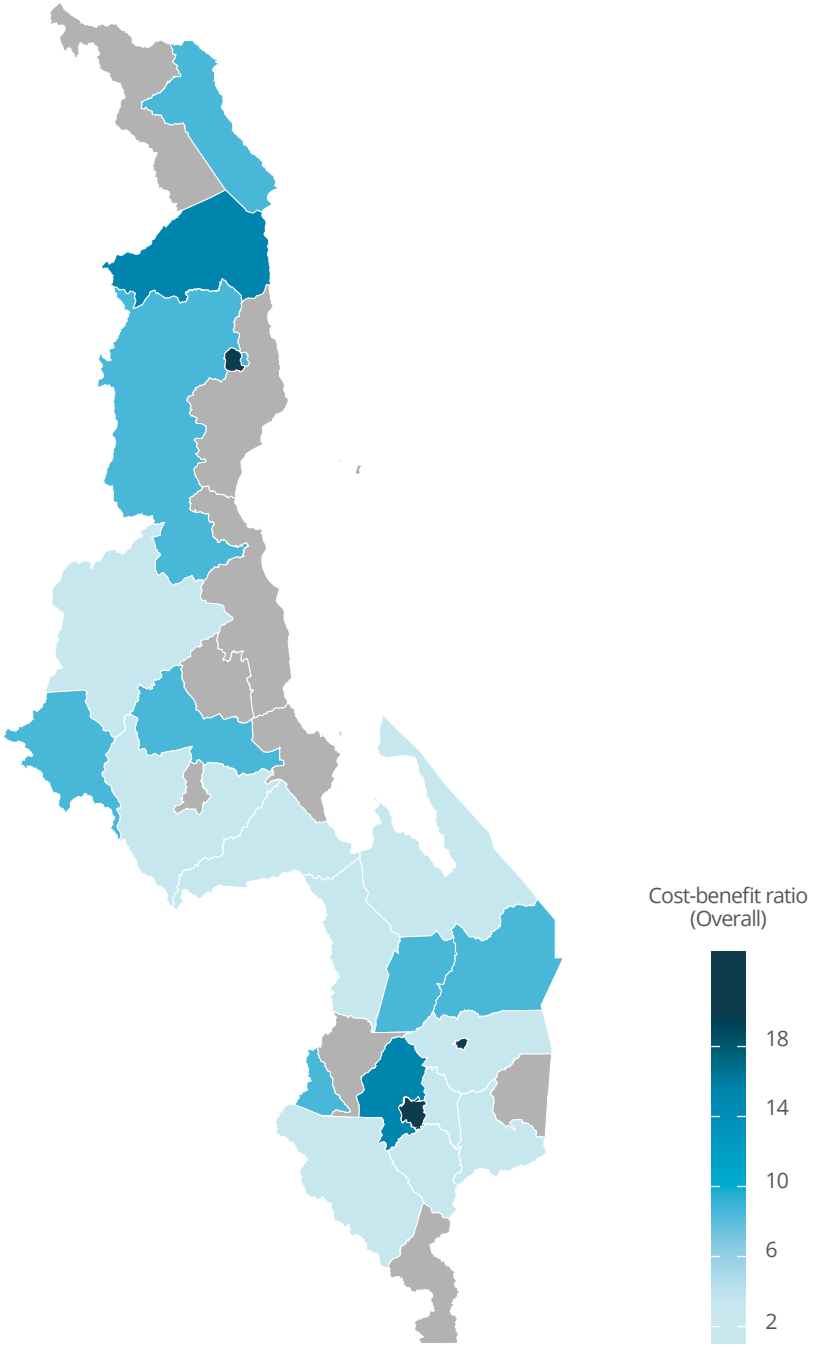
With support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, this approach has now been contextualized in seven countries across the African continent, where governments have expressed a strong demand for applying this form of analytics. The economic evaluation of school meals is led by partnerships of interdisciplinary groups of academics, researchers and policymakers from institutions in the countries concerned and combines innovative modelling with empirically grounded and locally validated data. Strong in-country engagement throughout the process enables decision makers to realize the potential of investing in school meals, and therefore encourages them to increase allocations of domestic resources towards school meals. In this respect, such national value-for-money studies have proven to be very powerful tools in making the case for governments to scale up their school meal programmes, in part because they show positive multipliers across sectors, but also because they directly appeal to finance ministries which make intersectoral budgetary allocations.

Preliminary findings from the seven African countries (Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger) suggest that school meal programmes are cost-beneficial in every subregion of every country in terms of the gains obtained in the education, health and nutrition sectors. Depending on the subregion targeted in the seven countries, for every US$1 invested in school meals, there is a positive benefit of up to US$30, with most in the range of US$3 – US$9. This was determined by the specific features of the school meal programmes and the local socioeconomic, educational and epidemiologic characteristics of the subregion targeted (as an example, see Figure 3.1 on Malawi). In some locations, these gains can be higher for female students, compared to male students (Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, 2024). Lastly, school meals can also bring large equity benefits within countries among those most in need: the value transfer (per school meal beneficiary) to households can be up to 10–20 percent of annual household food expenditure among the poorest households.

Figure 3.1 shows the estimated cost–benefit ratios of the school meal programme on education, health and nutrition for most districts in Malawi. In each district for which there is data, the level of benefits in schools which served school meals was compared with schools that did not. The results across the country varied considerably. No district had less than a US$2 return for every US$1 invested, and some returns were as high as US$18 per US$1. Further analysis is helping the government to identify why some districts had higher returns than others and to apply the lessons learned. Analysis of this kind can help "level the playing field" across the country and provides good examples for other countries when designing new programmes or seeking to improve their existing programmes.

Figure 3.1

Estimated cost-benefit ratios of the school meal programme on education, health and nutrition combined, by subregions (districts) in Malawi



Source: Malawi Value for Money Study Team. (2024). Value for Money of School Feeding Programs in Malawi. London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK.

School meals and education outcomes

Understanding the effects of school meals on education can provide governments with insight into a comprehensive array of the social returns from investing in school meals. If a child is hungry, they might not attend school or could struggle to focus in class if they do attend. Providing meals in school can both incentivize school attendance and enable students in school to stay engaged and more easily absorb educational content. These plausible pathways from a school health intervention to education outcomes highlight the potential of evaluating the impacts of school meals on educational attainment and learning.

The section compares the results of many studies conducted in different countries to gain a better understanding of how school meal programmes have improved education outcomes.

This is the most comprehensive review to date. It shows a positive effect from the provision of school meals on three important measures: educational attainment, cognitive skills and learning outcomes. These effects were substantial. For example, they showed a large, statistically significant improvement (up to 0.15–0.20 standard deviation) on real education skills such as maths and literacy.

A meta-analysis was conducted across 40 unique study treatment arms and 19 countries, providing one of the most comprehensive reviews of school meals on education outcomes to date. It reviews the evidence on school meal programmes and evaluates the impact on education outcomes, particularly schooling, learning and cognitive outcomes, and focuses on children in low and middle-income countries.

The study builds on and harmonizes prior systematic reviews and expands the set of studies considered by adding several new studies. The review analysed evaluations from randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental studies. Quasi-experimental studies add particular value as they enable the evaluation of school meal programmes at scale, and when delivered by government systems. Heterogeneity analysis was included, e.g. by kilocalories and protein intake. Finally, a detailed cost-effectiveness analysis was added, including cost-effectiveness comparisons with other educational interventions to inform government investment and prioritization. A random-effects meta-analysis was also conducted.[22]

The analysis for this review was conducted using the Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS) education measure, which is increasingly used by organizations such as the World Bank (Angrist et al., 2021). This measure combines schooling and learning into a single composite measure. LAYS are the education analogy to Disability-Adjusted Life Years in the health sector (as estimated in the annual Global Burden of Disease study), enabling value-for-money comparisons across a range of outcomes.

LAYS can be interpreted as a high-quality year of schooling – that is, schooling which results in substantial learning – according to global benchmarks. The measure has gained prominence in education and is the education pillar of the World Bank Human Capital Index. LAYS is also used by the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel to make recommendations on cost-effective education interventions, a body co-convened by the United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, UNICEF and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

Based on this analysis, there was a positive effect on educational attainment, cognitive skills and learning outcomes, with up to 0.15–0.20 standard deviation gains in maths and literacy skills. While school meals can be expensive, cost-effectiveness analysis was conducted across intervention types and the findings revealed high cost-effectiveness relative to several traditional education interventions. Results show that school meals can deliver up to half of a high-quality year of schooling per child per US$100 spent.

[22] Methods include calculating standard effect sizes, such as Cohen's d-statistics, 95 percent confidence intervals, as well as I^2 statistics which quantify heterogeneity and provide a measure of likely generalizability of results across settings. The results were examined by each type of outcome and stratified by several key dimensions. For schooling outcomes, an analysis was conducted with outcomes expressed in terms of years of schooling gained. For maths and literacy learning outcomes, as well as cognitive skills, the study conducted an analysis with outcomes expressed in terms of standard deviations. When outcomes were not originally reported as standard deviations, units were normalized and calculated as standard deviations.

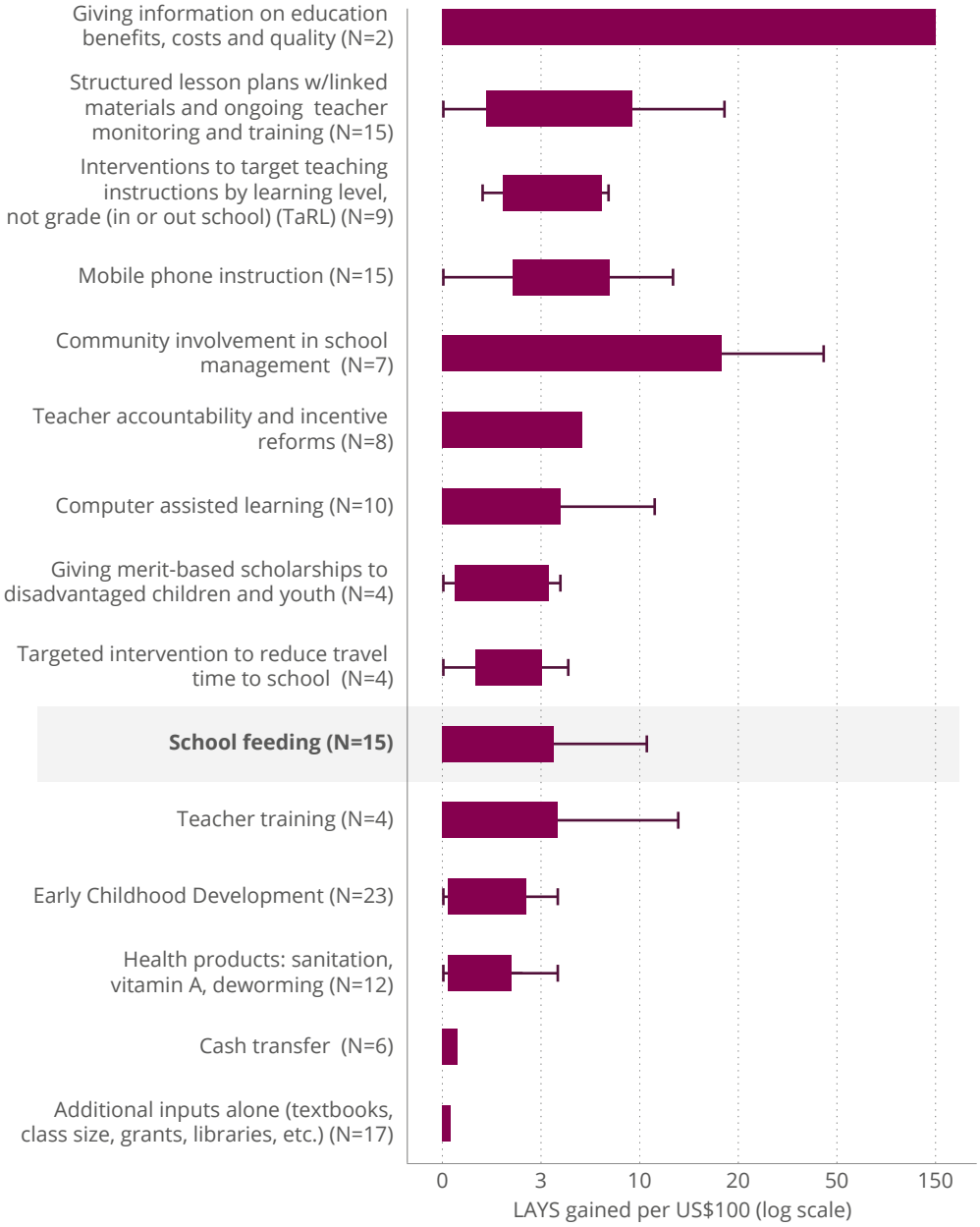
As a subset of the study, included cost data were examined to conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis and comparison. The cost per child identified by the evaluations examined ranged from an average of US$83 to a median of US$50 per child. In terms of annual costs, school meals per child per year cost approximately US$36 on average, with the median cost of US$22. Given effect sizes of up to 0.20 standard deviations on learning for maths outcomes, this equates to 0.25 high-quality (learning-adjusted) years of schooling using the methodology proposed by Angrist (Angrist N, 2025; Angrist et al., 2020). Using the average cost per intervention, it is estimated that 0.30 high-quality years of schooling are gained per US$100. If the median cost per intervention is used, 0.50 high-quality years of schooling per US$100 are obtained.

In a comparative cost-effectiveness analysis, and by comparing the effects of school meal programmes with traditional education interventions, the study found that school meals rank higher than some other popular education programmes and policies. These effects are noteworthy in a literature review which reveals over half of education interventions do not deliver any positive educational outcomes. For example, some popular educational interventions, such as general skills teacher training or providing more inputs such as laptops and school grants, have a small to null effect on educational outcomes. To this end, school meals represent a promising intervention to improve educational outcomes and, in some cases, more than conventional education interventions.

Figure 3.2

Comparison of Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS) gained per US$100 invested across different school-based health interventions

Compared with traditional education interventions, in terms of cost-effectiveness school meals rank higher than some popular education programmes and policies.



Source: Angrist, N., Evans, D. K., Filmer, D., Glennerster, R., Rogers, H., & Sabarwal, S. (2025). How to improve education outcomes most efficiently? A review of the evidence using a unified metric. Journal of Development Economics, 172, 103382. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2024.103382.

School meal programmes are often delivered at scale by government systems. The study to understand how effectiveness might be maintained at a larger scale found that effectiveness remains strikingly similar even when school meals are delivered to a larger number of students. There was no negative, statistically significant relationship between larger sample sizes and effect size. This is surprising given most social programmes typically experience "voltage drops" and often stop working as they are implemented at scale (List, 2022).

Overall, school meal programmes delivered positive, moderate effectiveness on education outcomes. The results suggest that multiple pathways are plausibly leading to increases in learning outcomes – both in terms of school meals being an incentive to enrol in school and as a mechanism to improve cognition and learning outcomes.

School meals and social protection outcomes

School meals have long played an important role as a social safety net, with roots tracing back to the 19th century, when private charities and religious organizations in Europe offered food to vulnerable children (Bryant, 1912). Over time, school meals have evolved into a formalized policy instrument in many countries. A 2021 survey of 185 school meal programmes revealed that 73 percent had the provision of a social safety net as one of their core objectives (GCNF, 2022a). Today, particularly in low and lower-middle-income countries, school meals are often targeted geographically, prioritizing regions where vulnerable populations are concentrated and where educational attainment is low.

At its core, the concept of school meals as a social safety net is grounded in programmes' ability to alleviate hunger caused by various shocks, whether idiosyncratic or systemic, and structural vulnerabilities. India's midday meal scheme serves as a powerful example. Research shows that the scheme successfully offset the negative nutritional impacts of drought on children (Singh et al., 2014). This illustrates the capacity of school meals to act as a buffer against food insecurity in times of crisis, helping to ensure that children maintain access to essential nutrition.

School meals are often adopted not only for their social safety net functions but because they address multiple needs across various domains – education, child nutrition and social protection. They provide an integrated approach to improving outcomes in all three areas, even if they are not necessarily the most efficient tool for any single domain on its own. By serving multiple purposes, school meals become an attractive policy choice, especially in resource-constrained environments where governments seek to maximize the impact of public programmes.

One alternative social protection tool that is frequently considered alongside school meals is cash transfers. Both cash transfers and school meals aim to promote school attendance while providing a safety net, but they do so in different ways. Cash transfers offer families direct financial support, which they can use as they see fit, while school meals provide in-kind assistance, ensuring that children receive at least one nutritious meal per day at school. The choice between these two approaches reflects the broader debate on "cash versus food," which has been the subject of much analysis.

Recent reviews of the "cash versus food" debate show that neither approach is universally superior (Gentilini, 2016). The relative effectiveness of cash transfers and food-based interventions such as school meals is highly context-specific. In some cases, cash may offer greater flexibility and empowerment for families; while in others, food provision may be more effective in directly addressing hunger and nutritional deficiencies, particularly where markets are unstable or families lack access to nutritious food. Ultimately, the decision on whether to prioritize school meals or cash transfers as a social safety net tool depends on the specific needs and circumstances of the population being served.

Box 3.1

The role of school meal programmes in social protection and facilitating a just transition[23]

School meal programmes make a critical contribution to ensuring children's development, including nutrition, health and education (Sanfilippo et al., 2012) and foster long-term social and economic development. By providing a consistent supply of essential nutrients to children, school meal programmes enhance human capabilities and generate savings equivalent to 10 percent of the income for economically disadvantaged households and even more for take-home rations (Bundy et al., 2018).

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) most recent *World Social Protection Report 2024–26* focuses on the essential role of universal social protection in enabling climate action and a just transition. In this context, school meal programmes have an important role to play (see Section 4.1.2 in *World Social Protection Report 2024–26* (ILO, 2024)).

When reviewing the adverse impacts of increasingly extreme weather events on living conditions (which affect families and children), the report identifies, among other things, malnutrition, temporary loss of income or reduced income, reduced school attendance, rising food prices and the risk of displacement. In each case, these issues can be mitigated by food supply policies or exacerbated by changes to food supply chains.

When reflecting on the impact of climate policies, the report identifies the need for reskilling, as well as the risk of higher unemployment that may occur from the closure of unsustainable sectors. Again, school meal policies have a role to play. Evidence on the employment effects of delivering school meals at a universal level is clear and, as such, school meals have an added value as a potential component of a social protection system, beyond the direct transfer effect.

[23] Parts of this text draw directly from ILO. 2024. World Social Protection Report 2024-26: Universal Social Protection for Climate Action and a Just Transition. Geneva.

Climate policies can result in lower incomes for people working in sectors that are harmful to the environment, as policies seek to reduce productivity in those sectors. Climate policies can also result in additional costs being added (e.g. through carbon taxes) on practices that are themselves potentially harmful to the environment, including energy production and transportation. Such increases in supply chain costs can affect food prices, increasing the risk that families with children access less and/or lower-quality food. Climate policies that affect agricultural practices can result in changes to food supply chains and food costs, with implications for children's access to adequate and nutritious food.

School meal policies have a clear role in addressing some of the risks incurred from shocks and stressors. Whatever the just transition leads to, demand for food will remain unchanged (and for many children worldwide, will still need to be advanced). Therefore, the implications of a just transition – the focus of the *World Social Protection Report* – will require systems of social protection to ensure that demand is met at least equally and then proportionally to need, particularly for children.

By providing a sustained and free-at-the-point-of-use social protection floor for all children, each national social system has the potential to deliver at least one regulated food supply chain for children as the just transition occurs, ideally coupled with access to a child benefit as a principal component of any social protection system for children. These systems can be managed in such a way that food purchases are protected from price gouging and indeed benefit from economies of scale at a time when food price inflation is likely to be a concern. They can also contribute to strengthening the social workforce and help reduce challenges related to workforce reskilling, unemployment and increased income poverty at the household level, benefiting a portion of the workforce across all regions within a country.

Emerging evidence from new randomized control trials

In 2021, in partnership with the World Bank, WFP launched the School-Based Programmes Impact Evaluation Window to generate a body of generalizable evidence on school meals by completing multiple, rigorous impact evaluations that address similar questions. These evaluations used experimental designs[24] to assess the extent to which school meals contribute to children's outcomes; support households and actors in the school meals value chain; and how different programme implementation modalities and complementary interventions influence these outcomes. Since the window's inception, six experimental impact evaluations have begun in The Gambia, Jordan, Burundi, Guatemala, Malawi and Madagascar.

Three years after the launch of the School-Based Programmes Impact Evaluation Window, several findings have emerged from the ongoing impact evaluations.

I. **School meals have a significant positive impact on children's food security, dietary diversity and mental well-being, particularly for girls.** In The Gambia, a randomized controlled trial compared over 2,000 children in 92 schools who were randomly assigned either to receive a school meal or no intervention.[25] The trial showed that providing a warm meal at school has a statistically significant positive impact on a child's food security, dietary diversity and well-being indicators such as stress and depression. The share of children reporting acceptable levels of food security increased by 12 percent[26] and the share of children reporting an above median dietary diversity score increased by 22 percent,[27] driven by their increased intake of various food groups. The proportion of children who reported moderate, moderately severe, or severe depression decreased by 13 percent, with similar patterns observed for reported stress levels. Evidence shows that girls, in particular, experienced the largest impacts as a result of receiving a warm meal.

[24] Such as randomized controlled trials and A/B testing.

[25] With schools in the comparison group prioritized for phase-in upon completion of the evaluation and scale-up of the programme.

[26] Food security was captured through the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, including a set of eight questions capturing a range of food insecurity levels over the previous week. A child was considered food-secure if s/he scored at least five of eight.

[27] Dietary diversity score was captured through a 24-hour recall and included eight food groups. The proportion of children with a dietary diversity score above five food groups increased by nine percentage points from 37 percent in the comparison group to 45 percent in the group of children receiving school meals, an increase equivalent to 0.34 food groups with a comparison mean of 5.01 food groups.



Children receive daily nutritious lunches in Sri Lanka.
World Vision/Melissa Sprake

II. Home-grown school meal programmes that buy locally can result in more school meals being distributed.

Many governments are increasingly sourcing food for school meals from smallholder farmers with the aim of boosting local agriculture. However, empirical evidence on how to best design decentralized school meal procurement programmes remains limited. Findings from ongoing impact evaluations show that service delivery in decentralized school meal programmes is high. For example, a lean impact evaluation[28] in Burundi compared the performance of the school meal programme (e.g. quantity, diversity and quality of meals) in 50 randomly selected schools that had transitioned to a new decentralized commodity voucher model where commodities were procured from local farmers, against 45 randomly selected schools which continued to use the old procurement model where WFP procured mainly from international markets. Evidence shows that the new commodity voucher model was successful in increasing overall school meal days by an average of 75 percent.

[28] Lean impact evaluations are conducted using an experimental design to test alternative implementation modalities. Rather than focusing on outcomes, lean impact evaluations focus on comparing output-level data and mainly rely on already existing monitoring systems for data collection. This has the advantage of minimizing data collection costs, while providing reliable evidence on implementation.

III. School meals represent a significant economic opportunity for workers and local farmers.

Evidence from a randomized controlled trial in Jordan shows that the individual income of women workers more than tripled when offered work in the production of healthy meals in the National School Meal Programme. Household income increased by a third and significant improvements in women's life satisfaction and men's attitudes towards gender norms were also identified. Evidence from the evaluation in Burundi shows that a significant proportion of cooperatives' revenues came from sales to schools, showing the potential of school meals to generate income for local farmers and cooperatives. Two randomized controlled trials in Malawi and Burundi, which are expected to be completed by 2026, are explicitly assessing the impact of home-grown school meal programmes on local farmers and the local economy.

As the first wave of impact evaluations concludes in Jordan, Guatemala and The Gambia, WFP is exploring the feasibility of new programmes and countries joining the School-Based Programmes Impact Evaluation Window. New countries will be accepted into the window for as long as there is demand and a rigorous impact evaluation is feasible. Impact evaluations will be conducted in collaboration with WFP's technical partners, including (among others) the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation department and the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition. While specific evaluation questions for each impact evaluation largely depend on country office priorities, impact evaluations conducted as part of the window are expected to contribute rigorous evidence in the following three thematic areas:

- The impact of school meal interventions and complementary activities on children's nutritional, health and learning outcomes; their relative cost-effectiveness; and the extent to which the benefits of school meal programmes vary by age, gender and throughout the year, depending on seasonal fluctuations, shocks and stressors.
- The impact of home-grown school meal programmes on the local economy, including farmers' incomes, cooperatives' revenues and market prices; and the extent to which different procurement models combined with crop and livelihood interventions can support farmers and communities in increasing their resilience and adaptation to climate shocks.
- Which procurement and delivery models are most suitable and cost-effective in supporting the transition of school meal programmes to national governments and local authorities.

Box 3.2

Testing for nutritionally optimal school meals in Cambodia

A cluster randomized trial was carried out in Cambodia, involving 40 schools across three regions in the country. Twenty children per school were selected at baseline according to predetermined eligibility criteria. The schools were allocated 1:1 to control and intervention arms.

For three months, children taking part in the intervention received school meals which complied with new nutrition guidelines and standards instead of their regular school meals, while control schools continued serving their regular meals without any modification. Children in the intervention schools also participated in regular food education lessons and activities, designed to add value to the school meals and support consumption of the improved meals.

Dietary intake among schoolchildren was assessed at baseline and endline using quantitative 24-hour recalls, with a second non-consecutive recall among a subsample of 240 children. Weighed food records of the school meals were also calculated to measure intake and waste. Baseline data were collected from March to June 2023 and endline data were collected in August–September 2024.

Primary outcomes of the trial will be the effect on children's usual intake of fruit, vegetables, animal-source foods and snack foods rich in salt, sugar and fat. Secondary outcomes include the differences in children's usual energy, protein and micronutrient intakes and of key food groups from the home diet across trial arms. Meal acceptability and implementation fidelity were also assessed.

The results of the trial will be available in 2025 and disseminated first to the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports; followed by the communities that participated in the trial through outreach activities; and the international research and school meal practitioner communities, through presentations at scientific conferences, technical webinars and peer-reviewed publications.

3.2 New evidence on programming practice

The world feeds approximately 466 million children every day through national school meal programmes that governments implement and support. Understanding what works and what doesn't is key to designing new and more efficient programmes, and to strengthening the programmes already in place. This section explores the insights from case studies of actual programmes operating at scale; then examines the progress made in setting standards for programmes; and finally looks at the work of the School Meals Coalition's Cities Feeding the Future Initiative, which is exploring the important role of municipalities in delivering school meal programmes.

Emerging examples of good practice in national programmes

The "Good Examples" Community of Practice of the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition supports national teams in drafting case studies on national school meal programmes across all School Meals Coalition member states. The case studies are written by national teams of academics, practitioners and stakeholders, and the format provides a simple and effective way to summarize and share experiences in school meal programming. In documenting the innovations implemented by farmers, communities, governments, the private sector and civil society, these case studies serve as a source of inspiration for countries seeking to expand their programmes. More than 50 country case studies are currently under way and 21 studies have been published to date, spanning four continents. Based on this collection of case studies, several research tools have been used to identify common good practices. Solution sciences, semantic analysis tools and artificial intelligence have made it possible to highlight the first "smart ideas" that appear across multiple case studies, such as:

Nutritional standards: Using nutritional standards to improve the quality and diversity of school meals is crucial. Greater variety in menus contributes to healthier and more balanced meals.

Cultural valuation and local sourcing: Incorporating cultural elements into menus allows for the promotion of local products and culinary traditions (e.g. indigenous foods, recipes). By sourcing traditional ingredients, school meal programmes support local procurement; strengthen food systems through small-scale producers and supply chains; and contribute to national food sovereignty.

Community engagement: Involving students, parents, communities and local authorities in the design and implementation of school meal programmes enhances national ownership.

Whole-school approach: Adopting a holistic approach that goes beyond quality meals by integrating complementary nutrition and health education fosters sustainable, health-promoting behaviours. Teachers play a crucial role in encouraging practices that support well-being.

Geographic and budgetary targeting for vulnerable children: Some countries direct budgets towards vulnerable children, contributing to poverty reduction (e.g. Ethiopia and Benin). Geographical targeting is sometimes employed to protect children from radicalization or recruitment by militant groups. While other countries, such as Finland, have introduced free meals for all children, positioning school meal programmes as a lever for national equity. Beneficiary households report significant improvements in living conditions and reduced food expenses due to school meal programmes (e.g. Burundi).

Coordinated governance: In countries where numerous actors (including NGOs) are involved, establishing a national agency enables coordinated efforts and ensures compliance with public policies on nutritional standards and local sourcing. For example, school meal agencies were created in Burundi and Togo, with adherence requirements for those working in the sector.

Emergency measures for resilience: Establishing emergency measures ensures the continuity and resilience of school meal programmes, as seen in Ukraine.

Planet-friendly school meals: Local procurement models, clean cooking technologies and vegetarian meals help reduce the carbon footprint of school meals (e.g. Kenya and France).

Investment in canteen infrastructure and access to clean water: Investment in school meals infrastructure and access to clean water guarantee canteen functionality and improve compliance with food safety and hygiene standards. A lack of potable water in schools can lead to canteen closures (e.g. Benin).

The "Good Examples" Community of Practice, alongside the Research Consortium, organizes various events that allow members to exchange experiences with international experts. Through multi-country discussions, members gain valuable insights, share knowledge and access tested solutions. This knowledge exchange accelerates the spread of smart solutions and innovative ideas, and promotes the scaling-up of quality school meal programmes worldwide.



A Guatemalan farmer plants onions to be sold to schools. WFP/Giulio d'Adamo

Setting new holistic nutrition guidelines and standards for school meals: the starting point for achieving better nutrition outcomes

Several systematic reviews, and the analysis of good programming practice described above, have demonstrated that enforcing strong nutrition standards for school meals and other types of school food can enhance diet quality and nutrition outcomes among schoolchildren across various socioeconomic backgrounds (Cohen et al., 2021; Durão et al., 2024; Micha et al., 2018). Developing and implementing nutrition guidelines and standards has therefore been recommended by multiple organizations to ensure that school meal programmes meet their intended diet and nutrition goals (FAO, 2019a; Global Panel, 2015).

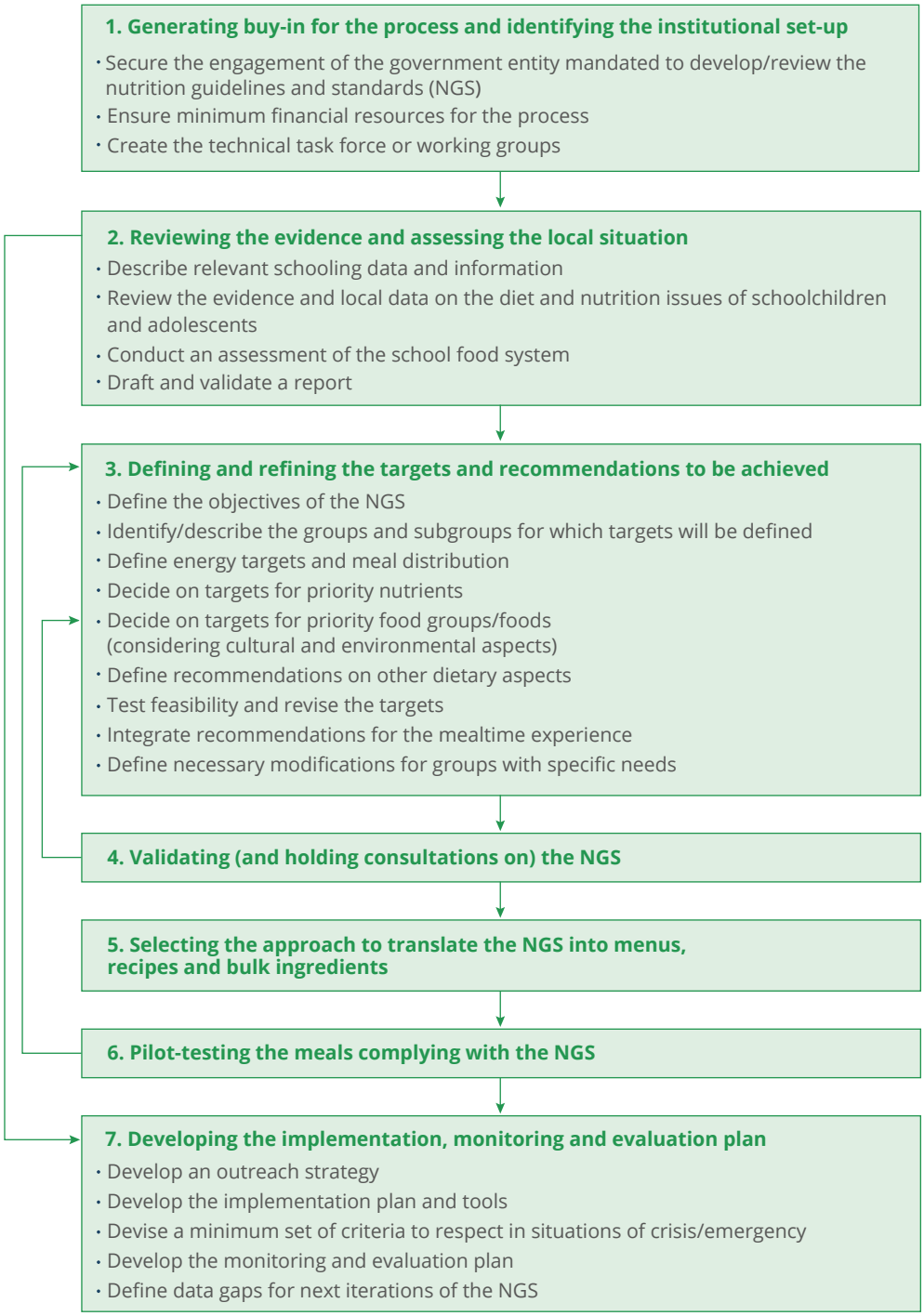
In response to a clear demand from countries for guidance on how to develop such nutrition guidelines and standards for their national school meal programmes, FAO (in partnership with WFP through a project supported by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture) has recently developed a detailed methodology that can be adopted by countries worldwide.

This methodology has been tested in Cambodia and Ghana, drawing on data from multiple baseline assessments conducted within the project. These assessments included food consumption surveys, school food environment assessments and qualitative studies of children and school staff's perceptions and practices around school food, as well as legal and capacity needs assessments. In combination with other relevant studies, these data were used to derive contextualized energy, nutrient and food targets for school meals. The process also resulted in recommendations to improve the meal experience and to strengthen connections between school meals and food education.

Now near completion, the methodology incorporates lessons learned from the testing phase and is expected to be launched in 2025. It applies a human rights lens and is structured into seven phases, each with iterative steps (see Figure 3.3). The methodology not only considers dietary and nutrition status data to set targets, but also factors in environmental sustainability objectives, possibilities of the school food system, sociocultural aspects and potential unintended consequences of adopting the standards.

Figure 3.3

Overview of the phases and steps to develop national school meal nutrition guidelines and standards

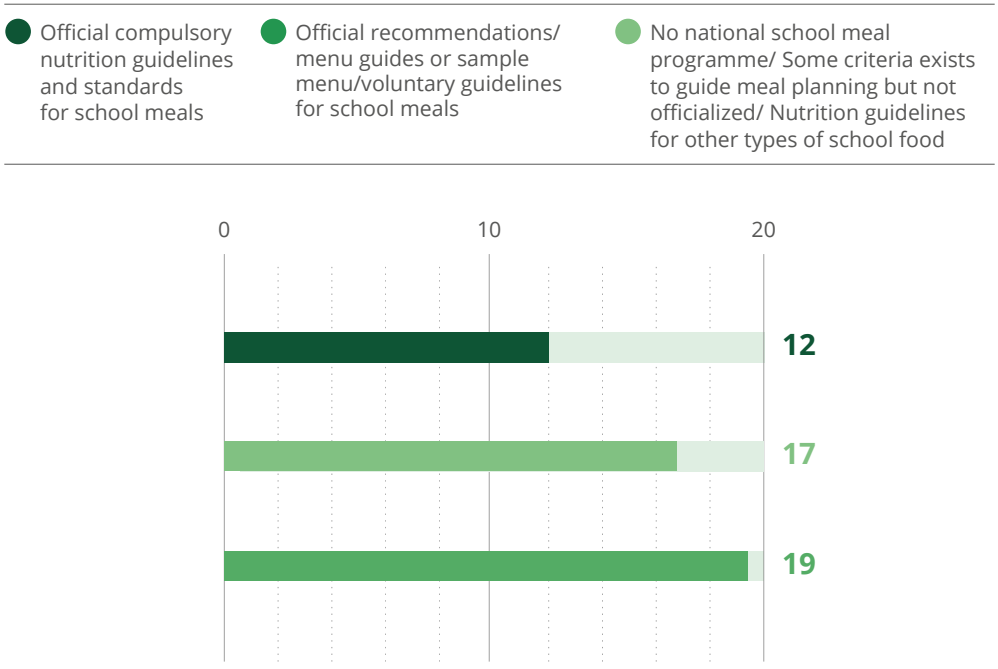


Source: Contribution from FAO's Technical team on Nutrition Guidelines and Standards.

In Cambodia, a study was conducted to evaluate the impact of the school meal nutrition guidelines and standards, developed through applying the methodology, on children's diet quality. Endline data has been collected, and the results are expected to bolster advocacy efforts for optimizing the programme's nutrition budget (see Box 3.2).

In parallel to the pilot in Cambodia and Ghana, a stocktaking exercise is under way to assess the status of school meal nutrition guidelines and standards worldwide. The goal of which is to identify the most common challenges technicians and stakeholders face in developing, implementing and evaluating their school meal nutrition guidelines and standards, ensuring that the methodology is well-suited for its purpose. At the time of publication, 48 countries have been interviewed and only 12 reported that they had official, compulsory school meal nutrition standards (see Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4
Status of school meal nutrition guidelines and standards in countries that have participated in the stocktaking exercise
Of the 48 countries interviewed as part of the stocktaking exercise, only 12 have mandatory school meal nutrition guidelines and standards.



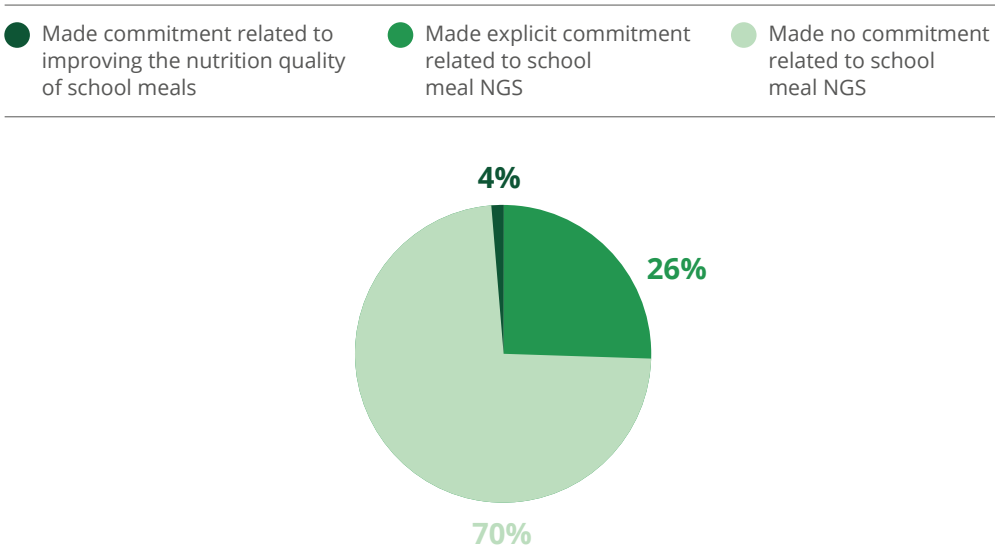
Source: Contribution from FAO's Technical team on Nutrition Guidelines and Standards.

Interest is growing among members of the School Meals Coalition to develop or update their standards as part of national efforts to improve the quality of school meal programmes. As of October 2024, 12 of the 46 countries that have made commitments have specifically pledged to develop or review their national school meal nutrition guidelines and standards (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5

Number of School Meals Coalition member countries with commitments relevant to school meal nutrition guidelines and standards

About 30 percent of countries with commitments to the School Meals Coalition have made commitments relevant to school meal nutrition guidelines and standards.



Source: Contribution from FAO's Technical team on Nutrition Guidelines and Standards.

Programming practice at the municipal level: new evidence emerging from the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative

The School Meals Coalition's Cities Feeding the Future Initiative has delivered insightful findings and is committed to serving as a platform for both leading new evidence on the current status of school meal programmes and setting the agenda on school meals at an international level.

First, the *School Meals: the transformative potential of urban food policies* report (MUFPP, 2024) was published, defining a common taxonomy on the infrastructure of the school meals service; the diverse models of existing school meal programmes; and the responsibilities in place within school food environments in cities. Such a taxonomy represents a key advancement in creating a shared vocabulary among cities, facilitating the sharing of best practices and improving the potential for learning exchanges. The report also offers a library of good examples belonging to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact community which can be used as inspiration for cities from different areas of the world, eager to strengthen their school meal programmes.

Second, within the initiative, the *first ever database of urban food systems* worldwide was developed. The database aims to map the urban food system of signatory cities to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and better understand specific learning needs, via a structured survey. The survey design went through multiple participatory reviews with the Milan Pact's Steering Committee to guarantee that relevant aspects from different areas of the world were appropriately covered. The School Meals Coalition's Research Consortium and Data and Monitoring Initiative also comprehensively supported development of the survey. The final survey included 61 written questions articulated in the six Milan Pact categories. Areas of investigation included the governance structure of the urban food system; aspects related to sustainable diets and nutrition; actions on social and economic equity; and practices involving food production, food supply and distribution, and food waste. The primary focus was devoted to school meal programmes, with a total of 20 questions prepared. The survey was submitted online to 290 signatory cities and was complemented by interviews with responsible city officers to further investigate a subset of aspects related to school meal programmes. Sixty cities completed the survey. The emerging database is the first of its kind to synthetically describe the efforts of cities in governing the food system, and specifically school meal programmes, within urban boundaries.

It will serve as a novel basis for future research; practical actions targeting experiences and lessons learned; and to facilitate the identification of champion mayors.

Lastly, a *comprehensive inventory of school meal programme practices from ASEAN countries* was designed. As part of the project – Spreading Experiences and Knowledge on School Meals Programmes in ASEAN Cities – participating city officers from eight ASEAN member states have developed a work proposal with the objective of designing a project to be executed in their home cities for developing school meal programmes. For each project work proposal (co-created with the food policy tools developed within the Horizon 2020 Food Trails research project), the inventory includes details on the current status of the school meal programme in the city and the specific needs that the proposal aims to address. It then describes the project's ambition; the specific objectives; the scale and the expected duration of the project to be implemented; the concrete impact towards the set objectives; and the monitoring to be used for measuring such impact. Finally, the inventory includes a detailed workplan for implementing the project work proposal together with the potential barriers that might challenge implementation, and the financial and human resources required. The objective of the inventory is threefold: in the short term to inform implementation of the project and provide adequate support to cities; while in the long term, to systematize the status of school meals in cities and assess whether the provision of school meals is increasing or decreasing; and to support advocacy processes in the Asia Pacific region in line with ASEAN objectives to place school meals as a central priority for investments.

Box 3.3

Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition – Country experience of using the SABER policy tool to self-assess and benchmark national school meal programmes

In 2011, the World Bank developed the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) initiative to guide low and lower-middle-income countries in designing, strengthening and tracking their national education system policies. This initiative was focused primarily on the education sector with the goal of supporting the development of sound policy frameworks to improve learning outcomes. In 2012, Donald Bundy then with the Human Development Vice-Presidency of the World Bank Group, worked with a multi-agency team (including the authors of the 2009 policy guidance entitled *Rethinking School Feeding (Bundy* et al., 2009)) to create two additional SABER frameworks that sought to link child well-being with education outcomes: through school-based health interventions (SABER School Health) and the provision of school meals (SABER School Feeding) (World Bank Group Education Global Practice, 2016).

The inclusion of multisectoral frameworks coincided with two milestones: first, the education sector's recognition of the important role of school health and nutrition interventions for the health, development and education of schoolchildren at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 (UNESCO, 2014); and second, country-led demands to expand national school meal programmes as a social safety net during the 2008 food, fuel and financial crises (Bundy et al., 2009).

The World Bank SABER policy tool helps countries systematically collect information about the quality of their school meals policies and identify actionable priorities using a framework to benchmark current policies against good practice (World Bank, 2012). SABER is unusual in that it is a government-led, government-completed process, and engages stakeholders from all relevant sectors, including health, education and agriculture, which helps to achieve a consensus view on the ambitious but realistic national commitments to strengthen current school meal programming. This approach helps ensure that policies are sustained even when there are changes in political leadership.



In a refugee camp in Chad, school meals bring children to class. World Vision/Amy Van Drunen

A review by Schultz et al. (2024) documented the uptake of relevant SABER policy tools over the last decade, and found SABER has been adopted worldwide, particularly in low and lower-middle-income countries and in Africa. The tool has been used at least 81 times in 59 countries across all income classifications, with two thirds of all applications conducted in sub-Saharan Africa. This broad uptake shows that SABER has become an institutionalized mechanism for governments to self-assess and strengthen their national school meal programmes.

Figure 3.6
Cumulative number of SABER School Health and School Feeding exercises completed since 2012 globally and in sub-Saharan Africa, by year



Analysing 51 comparable SABER School Feeding surveys completed between 2012 and 2021 suggests that countries with longer established national school meals frameworks tend also to be more advanced in other policy areas, and vice versa. Several countries found the tool useful enough to complete it multiple times, revealing a potential secondary role of tracking policy progress over time if administered routinely.

Given the complementarities between school meals and other school-based health interventions, the World Bank, WFP and the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, have combined key elements of the SABER School Feeding and SABER School Health framework into a single, comprehensive policy tool. "Healthy-SABER" is envisaged to further engage multisectoral actors in the design of effective and holistic school health policies and clarify key areas for further investment.

It is currently being rolled out by governments across Africa. SABER is likely to become an increasingly important tool for member countries of the School Meals Coalition. SABER can be used by the Coalition's member states as a tool to develop ambitious but realistic national commitments to improve and scale current national programming.

Conducting repeat exercises would also show progress towards the presence of a costed policy and budget line; national standards for school food; local procurement for school meal menus; and whether school meals are part of a complementary package of school health services.

Box 3.4
The School Food Global Hub

Launched in 2022, the School Food Global Hub is a knowledge exchange platform and one-stop shop for resources and country profiles on school food and nutrition from around the world.

The hub serves two main audiences: professionals, technicians and policymakers; and schoolchildren, adolescents, school staff, families and all those interested in school meals, child nutrition, school food environments, food education and everything in between!

The hub was developed by FAO in collaboration with WFP, supported by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture. Its design and scope were further enriched through consultations with technical experts from UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO, IFAD, GCNF, CGIAR, LSHTM, UN Nutrition, GIZ and the School Meals Coalition.

At the time of publication, the hub includes more than 40 country profiles, showcasing various aspects that are usually not documented and published elsewhere, such as how nutrition criteria for school meal planning are determined; the policies and instruments in place to regulate the school food environment; and whether food education is integrated into school systems and how it is implemented.

Each profile is linked to other platforms such as the Global Child Nutrition Foundation, which gather and present quantitative data on school meal programmes, and to the FAOLEX and Right to Food databases which house school nutrition policies and legislation and provide details on the level of recognition the Right to Food receives in national constitutions. The profiles also reference relevant studies and reports conducted within the country, such as case studies,[29] impact evaluations and more.

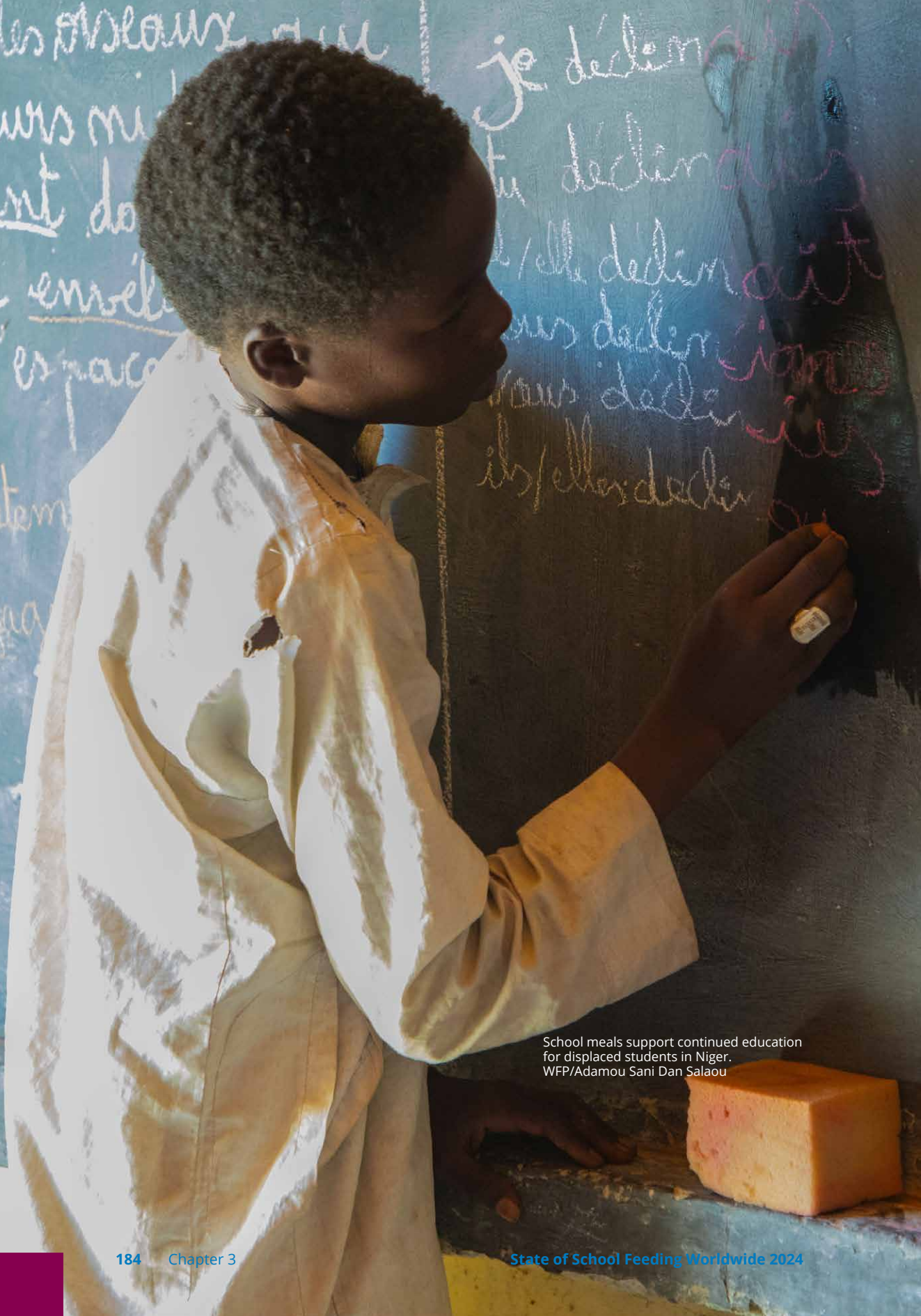
By browsing the profiles, users can discover details of the food groups that should be part of the meals provided to children, in which frequencies and what these recommendations are based on. They can also compare how these nutrition criteria are translated into menus and recipes; whether they are voluntary or obligatory; and if compliance is monitored at school level and how. Users can explore how food and nutrition education is integrated into national curricula; what students are expected to learn; which grades it covers and even access learning materials that are used by the students.

A key feature of the School Food Global Hub is the "youth corner", where schoolchildren and adolescents can share key messages about the importance of nutritious school food on their social media. They can also submit videos, pictures and stories reflecting what matters to them and what their vision is for their school food environments. In late 2024, nine students were chosen from over 60 global submissions made through the hub, to become FAO-WFP-SMC school food advocates. The selected students[30] will use their voices to champion children's rights to nutritious and more sustainable school meals; participate in global events and share their experiences through various media.

The hub serves as a repository for technical resources developed by UN agencies and other organizations, offering guidance and best practices on various design aspects of school food and nutrition programmes and policies. The hub also houses the latest systematic reviews on the evidence of school meal programmes; multicomponent school food and nutrition interventions; food education programmes on diet, nutrition and education and other outcomes. Find out more here: *https://www.fao.org/platforms/school-food/en*

[29] Several of these case studies were developed under the supervision of the "Good Examples" Community of Practice of the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition. *https://www.fao.org/platforms/school-food/countries-corner/good-practices-and-case-studies/en*

[30] Find out more about the young advocates here: *https://www.fao.org/platforms/school-food/news-and-events/news/news/check-out-the-winners-of-the-school-food-youth-advocate-winner-contest!/en*



School meals support continued education for displaced students in Niger.
WFP/Adamou Sani Dan Salaou

Box 3.5

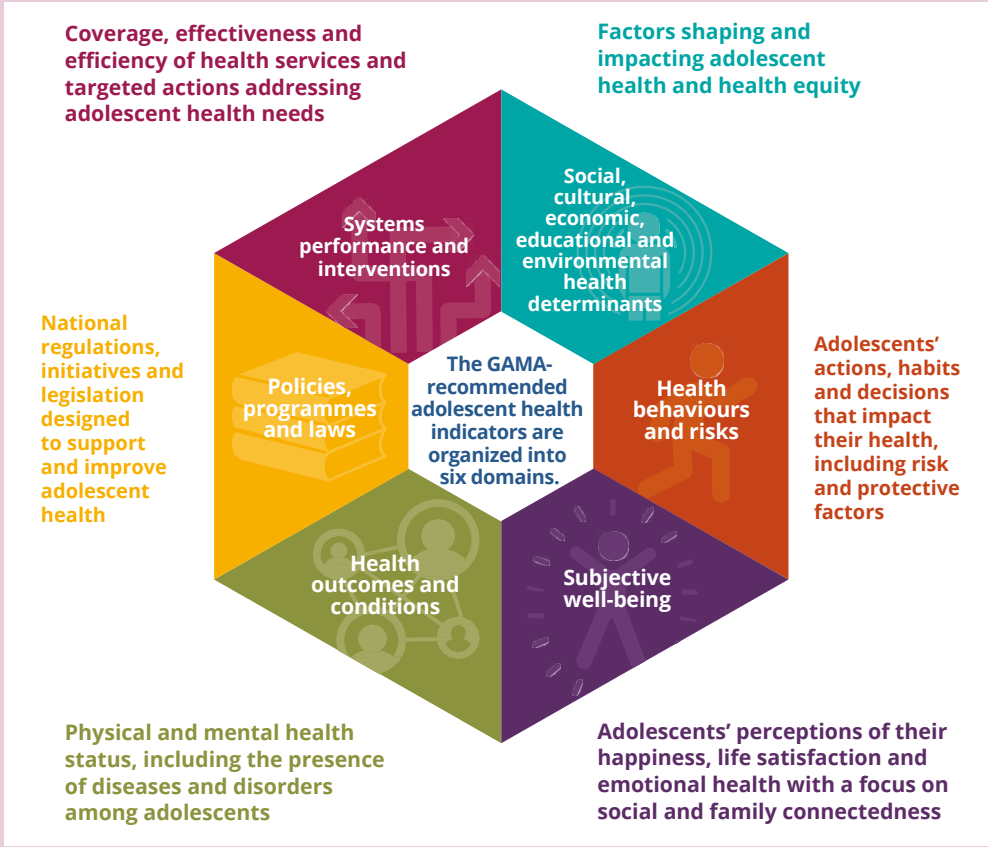
The World Health Organization's Global Action for Measurement of Adolescent health (GAMA) recommended indicators

Adolescent health measurement has historically been inconsistent and incomplete, with various measurement initiatives promoting the use of different indicators. This has led to duplication of work in some areas relevant to adolescent health, and to persistent measurement gaps in others.
To improve and harmonize adolescent health measurement and focus efforts on the most important issues, in 2018, WHO established the Global Action for Measurement of Adolescent health (GAMA) Advisory Group with the support of seven other UN agencies: the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, the World Bank Group and WFP.

GAMA has undertaken a five-year structured and participatory process to select a set of 47 indicators recommended for global, regional and national adolescent health measurement. The indicators help illustrate a comprehensive picture of adolescent health and provide a foundation for identifying priorities for action; allocating adequate resources; monitoring and evaluating programmes; and advocating for this critical population.

The indicators are organized into six domains reflecting the multisectoral approach needed to address and monitor progress in adolescent health: policies, programmes and laws; systems performance and interventions; social, cultural, economic, educational and environmental health determinants; health behaviours and risks; subjective well-being; and health outcomes and conditions (see Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7
GAMA indicator domains



Most of the 47 indicators recommended for adolescent health measurement derive from existing initiatives such as the SDG framework. Therefore, almost all countries have existing data for many of the indicators.

The Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!) provides an evidence-based foundation for using the indicators at national level to systematically plan and implement adolescent health and well-being programmes. The starting point for implementation is understanding what data are already available and where gaps exist. This can be completed with support from WHO and its partners to:

1. Identify all relevant data sources and their coverage of adolescents by sex, age and subpopulation.
2. Populate the available data for the corresponding adolescent health indicators.
3. Use the available data to prioritize actions to improve adolescent health.
4. Determine data gaps and take steps to fill them.

This process enables countries to systematically address the most important adolescent health issues and collect additional critical information for action. Global stakeholders also benefit from consistent and harmonized data to guide global actions towards improving adolescent health and tracking progress across the globe.

3.3 Financing a breakthrough – the role of innovative finance

What would it take to finance a breakthrough in the provision of school meals?

The School Meals Coalition's goal is to ensure that every child has access to a hot school meal every school day by 2030. But translating this goal into delivery will require a step-increase in finance, both through domestic budgets and Official Development Assistance. Innovative financing could play an important supporting role.

Research by the Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition has provided some indicative cost estimates for a global "big push" on school meals financing (Watkins et al., 2024). There is a surprising dearth of data in this area. The primary source of evidence remains a study using cost data from over a decade ago (Gelli & Daryanani, 2013). Adjusting that data for United States inflation, the Sustainable Financing Initiative's research derives from a 2023 benchmark cost of US$64 annually per pupil to provide decent quality school meals in low and lower-middle-income countries.

This figure is significantly higher than the budget allocations reported in the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* (WFP, 2022), implying that any scale-up in the provision of school meals will have to include supplementary financing provisions for current programmes.

The Sustainable Financing Initiative has emphasized the tentative nature of the adjusted cost estimates. Since 2018, many developing countries have been hit hard by food price inflation, which is likely to have eroded the real value of school meals budgets. However, the emergence of large-scale national programmes may have led to cost reductions. These uncertainties underscore the need for detailed national cost estimates to guide financial planning.

Two stark findings emerge from the cost data and the Sustainable Financing Initiative's analysis. The first is that, measured against the benchmark of national income, an ambitious scale-up of school meal programmes looks eminently affordable. For illustrative purposes, it would take around US$2.7 billion annually over five years to finance an expansion in school meals to reach an additional 162 million children by 2030. This represents under 0.1 percent of GDP for low-income countries, and even less for lower-middle-income countries. These are relatively small investments with very high human development returns in terms of child nutrition, education and food security. The benefit-to-cost ratio is estimated to be between US$7 and US$35 (Verguet et al., 2020).

Measured against the benchmark of budget capacity, the affordability picture looks very different. The second finding is that most low and lower-middle-income countries would struggle to finance a rapid scale-up of school meals solely from domestic budgets. Most of these countries emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic on a lower growth trajectory, which has depressed government revenues at a time of rising inflation. Meanwhile, unsustainable debt is crowding out vital social investments. Scheduled debt servicing for countries eligible for World Bank concessional lending was US$88 billion in 2023/2024 – more than these countries spend on health or basic education. While fiscal circumstances vary enormously, many low and lower-middle-income countries are struggling to maintain real social sector spending. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, a combination of rising debt, low levels of revenue collection, restricted access to affordable international finance and falling aid has left governments facing what the International Monetary Fund describes as "a great funding squeeze".

Innovative finance could help relieve the pressure. While there is no fixed definition of innovative finance, it essentially describes resource mobilization practices that look beyond standard government budget and international aid practices. School meals are conspicuous by their absence from current innovative finance practices, but new opportunities are emerging. In a forthcoming report prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation, the Sustainable Financing Initiative explored the emerging innovative finance landscape to identify promising pathways to new and additional funding for school meals.

"Sin taxes" could play an enhanced role. Almost every government in the world already taxes alcohol and tobacco and a growing number tax sugar-sweetened beverages, partly to curtail demand for products harmful to public health and partly to generate revenue. Modelling estimates based on a report prepared by the Task Force on Fiscal Policy for Health suggest that another 0.6 percent of GDP could be raised through sin taxes (Lane et al., 2021). These taxes are easy to collect, generate public health benefits and can be designed to produce progressive outcomes, with the poor securing more of the benefits and carrying less of the cost.

Taxes on sugar-based sweeteners have a special relevance for school meals. Many governments are now using school meal programmes to support wider efforts aimed at combating obesity and overweight. Advertising sugar-heavy drinks to children can have unintended or negative effects. Using the revenue from sugar-based sweetener levies to finance school meals is an example of a tax on a "public bad" being used to promote investments in a "public good". Taxes on ultra-processed foods, such as those introduced in Colombia, have a similar effect.

Hydrocarbon revenue could also be mobilized. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and other regions are set to secure significant revenues from natural resource wealth, including hydrocarbons. All too often natural resource wealth has been associated with weak governance, slow economic growth and the skewing of benefits towards wealthier social groups – the so-called "resource curse". Investing the hydrocarbon revenues that will come on stream over the next few years in school meals would convert a (temporary) economic asset into (permanent) human development benefits. Countries such as Senegal, Mozambique and Tanzania, all of which are likely to secure substantial hydrocarbon revenues, could follow the example of Bolivia, which finances a universal school meal programme almost entirely from a hydrocarbon tax (Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition, 2024b).

Earmarking revenues for school meals could serve the twin purpose of building support for taxation and raising investment levels. Many public finance economists raise justified concerns about the practice of assigning revenues to specific budget lines, pointing to the rigidity, volatility in financial flows and weak accountability that often follows. Yet most countries – rich as well as poor – earmark revenues. Establishing a direct link between the source of revenues and the benefits that could arise can help make the case for specific taxes; provide a predictable stream of finance; and build social contracts between governments and their citizens. One striking example comes from the Philippines, which earmarked the revenues from "sin taxes" for spending on national health insurance. There may be a similarly compelling case for earmarking part of new tax revenues from sugar-based sweeteners, ultra-processed foods and natural resource wealth for school meals.

International cooperation has a role to play in supporting governments transition to full financing of their school meal programmes. Currently, the international aid effort for school meals is chronically under-financed – amounting to just US$287 million in 2021, or 0.1 percent of development assistance – and poorly coordinated. An estimated US$1.2 billion of international finance is needed for a big scale-up of school meal programmes. Innovative finance could change this picture (Watkins et al., 2024).

Global health funds illustrate what is possible. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has drawn on an extensive range of debt swaps, co-financing arrangements and revenue from corporate brand deals to finance its work. Around one quarter of the revenue channelled through Gavi, the global vaccines initiative, is drawn from innovative finance, including bonds underwritten by donor governments. While health funds have their own distinctive features, they demonstrate that the consolidation and coordination of government, donor, philanthropic and civil society efforts around well-defined goals can create platforms for innovative finance at scale.

Not all innovative finance options offer ready-made solutions to the school meal financing gap. The clearest case is debt swaps (Hurley; & Martin, 2024). In principle, creditors can waive claims of future debt service payments, allowing governments to direct the savings towards social-sector investments, including school meals. In practice, only a small group of official "Paris Club" creditors provide debt swap arrangements, and current rules limit the scope for swapping non-concessional debt. This means that most debt swap arrangements provide limited finance and leave unsustainable debts intact. Debt owed to private creditors and emerging market providers, which counts for the bulk of repayments for low and lower-middle-income countries, is not usually covered by debt swaps. While there are some recent exceptions to this rule, involving marine conservation financing, current options remain limited. This could change if more Paris Club members and emerging market creditors provide debt swap arrangements, and the rules were amended to allow swaps of non-concessional debt. However, a sustainable financing solution will require more comprehensive debt relief spanning all groups of creditors.

Climate finance is another potential source of innovative funding for school meals. As highlighted in the Research Consortium's white paper on school meals and food systems, well-designed and properly financed school meal programmes can make an important contribution to a just green transition (Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, 2023). Procurement for these programmes provides governments with a vehicle for supporting low-carbon, sustainable and regenerative agriculture, while at the same time supporting livelihoods of the rural poor through home-grown school meals – a vital component of climate change adaptation. The markets created by national school meal programmes can create investment opportunities in the drought-resistant and biofortified crops needed to protect food security in an era of global warming.

Despite these well-established effects, school meals have been almost entirely absent from the dialogue on climate finance (Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition, 2024a, 2024b). This represents a lost opportunity. Carbon pricing currently generates US$105 billion annually – and that figure is set to rise steeply. Climate change adaptation financing is also on the rise. US$29 billion was provided through multilateral development banks in 2023. Research commissioned by the Sustainable Financing Initiative on the Green Climate Fund's portfolio found almost no evidence of funding for school meals.

To change this, school meals will need to be positioned as part of wider efforts to align food system reform with initiatives to address climate and disaster risks, which must start with national governments. One reason for the absence of school meals from climate change adaptation funding is their omission from the Nationally Determined Contribution papers through which governments set out their Paris Agenda commitments. Including the provision of school meals in Nationally Determined Contribution papers could be a concrete action. Moreover, multilateral development banks and climate funds could do far more to integrate school meals into their operations. There is also an urgent need to redistribute finance mobilized through carbon levies.

Blended finance could also play a role. While this category of innovative finance spans a vast array of instruments – including green, sustainable, social investments and impact bonds – it describes the mobilization of private investment through public finance in the form of risk guarantees. In certain aspects, school meals are not amenable to blended finance because these types of investment need to generate a profit for investors. However, there is untapped potential for public–private partnerships to invest in the development of smallholder agriculture and the small and medium-sized enterprises linking farms to schools.

New approaches to risk guarantees can play a wider role. Providing guarantees can reduce the risks associated with lending, enabling multilateral development banks to lend more. The International Finance Facility for Education combines risk guarantees and interest rate subsidies to unlock multilateral development bank finance on affordable terms. While traditional aid delivers a dollar in development assistance for every dollar in grants, the International Finance Facility for Education blends risk guarantees and grants to deliver US$7 in support of every US$1. Tapping into that multiplier effect could transform school meal financing in many countries.[31]

[31] The financial engineering is explained in detail here: *https://iff-education.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/IFFED-Explainer.pdf*

Over the next few years, the momentum behind innovative finance is set to gather pace. The Global Solidarity Levies task force established at the 2023 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change conference of the parties (COP 28) is set to report by 2025 and make recommendations on a range of innovative finance levies. The G20 has called for a renewed effort to mobilize innovative finance for the SDGs.

One proposal, outlined in a report prepared for the Brazilian Presidency of the G20, calls for a 2 percent wealth tax on billionaires – a measure that would raise up to US$250 billion a year globally. The political and economic feasibility of the intervention can be debated, but the fact that four days' worth of revenue from a modest tax on 3,000 of the world's richest people would be sufficient to finance school meals for the "162 million children ambition" is both a reflection of the world's shocking inequalities, and a reminder of what can be achieved through innovative finance.

3.4 Way forward

This chapter shows the extraordinary complexity of the topics involved in research and evidence on school meal programmes. The work involves an unusually multisectoral approach, both in terms of outcomes and programme design. In terms of outcomes, it is apparent that school meal programmes have important consequences for education, health, nutrition, human capital, earning capacity, social protection, environment, planetary health and agricultural systems. In terms of inputs, all these sectors are again important, as well as diet, labour economics, political economy, cooking technologies and programme management. Even this extensive list is not comprehensive; for example, all aspects of management are also relevant. It is no surprise then that much of the work reported here is both highly technical and subject specific, and that the research and evidence included in this edition is both incomplete and at an early stage. Subsequent editions of the publication will continue to build on these topics.

An important conclusion is that understanding in this area is evolving and becoming more connected. It is no coincidence that much of this work has been led by initiatives arising from the School Meals Coalition in response to demand from its member countries, as well as topics addressed by specialist units within WFP, FAO, WHO and other UN agencies with a mandate which includes the broad range of issues relevant to school meal programmes.

Case study 7

Peru's investment in disaster preparedness to ensure school meals reach vulnerable populations

The Peruvian government, with support from WFP, has made significant investments in strengthening its social protection system's responsiveness in emergencies. The Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion has developed a legal framework and regulations to permit social programmes to expand and adjust their design in emergencies; and approved protocols to guide what will happen to seven national programmes in emergency situations. For national school meal programmes, protocols include training school administrators on emergency preparedness; targeting schools in high-risk regions vulnerable to emergencies, especially those serving Amazonian indigenous populations; and assigning responsibilities for local data collection and coordination. The government conducted simulations and drills in regions most at risk of natural disasters from El Niño weather patterns to test the developed protocols. The protocols are linked to a financial activation plan, which includes new emergency funding. The aim is to ensure school meals and other programmes continue to deliver effectively during disasters and can be used to support additional emergency responses.

The national school meal programme is currently undergoing a redesign aimed at ensuring a diverse, nutritious and culturally appropriate diet, with a participatory approach that includes fresh food from local markets and family farming, moving beyond its traditional logistics focus.

This redesign will include new modalities, one of which is being piloted in some schools with the support of WFP, through cash transfers to school management committees made up of parents.

Case study 8

Ukraine's School Nutrition Reform amid war, preparing for recovery

Under the initiative of First Lady, Olena Zelenska, Ukraine's School Nutrition Reform has become one of the key priorities to ensure a safe educational and nutritious safety net for children. Since the launch of the reform in 2020, the initiative has garnered strong political and financial support from government agencies and national and international partners.

The war in Ukraine has left an estimated 5 million people food insecure throughout the country, exacerbated by the substantial reduction in students' access to school meals. During times of war, child and adolescent well-being is especially critical, as many youths experience psychological trauma worsened by unstable living conditions and inconsistent access to food.

In October 2023, Ukraine joined the School Meals Coalition, and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the Strategy for Reforming the School Nutrition System for 2023–2027. This strategy became the basis for regional programmes and helped communities determine priority areas of work. The School Nutrition Reform has four strategic goals:

- increasing the financial and institutional capacity of communities to implement the reform;
- modernizing the infrastructure of food blocks,[32] implementing different models of food organization – basic kitchens, support kitchens, kitchen factories;
- increasing human resource capacity and creation of culinary hubs for training food block workers; and
- focusing on improving pupils' eating habits and raising awareness among pupils, parents and stakeholders about choosing healthy and quality food.

The Government of Ukraine has continued its efforts to establish a free school meals policy. To support these efforts, Ukraine and the School Meals Coalition's Research Consortium, with the support of the WHO Country Office in Ukraine, its Regional Office for Europe and WFP, developed a policy brief to translate existing research on universal free school meals into action. This policy brief reviewed the implementation and expansion of school meal programmes in the context of Ukraine's post-war reconstruction efforts.

[32] "Food blocks" is the term the government uses for cafeterias.

By September 2024, over 800,000 pupils had access to school meals – a significant increase compared to earlier years, especially considering ongoing challenges caused by the war. Notably, pupils from vulnerable groups were prioritized, receiving free meals through local funding.

Since the introduction of state support (from October 2024):

- at the initiative of the President of Ukraine, free hot meals for all primary school pupils were provided at the expense of a subvention from the state budget;
- approximately US$48 million was allocated to provide meals for over 1 million primary school pupils; and
- the total number of pupils covered by hot meals increased to 1,603,000.

Looking ahead, Ukraine is scaling the programme nationwide. Starting in 2025, over 450,000 secondary school pupils in frontline regions will receive free school meals, with plans to expand to all grade levels by 2026, bringing the vision of universal, equitable school nutrition within reach.

Extraordinary measures were taken not to leave the most vulnerable children behind: underground schools were built in different cities close to the frontline to offer pupils better opportunities to safely benefit from an in-person education, despite the threat of air attacks. During post-war recovery efforts, a robust school meal programme can be a catalyst for boosting domestic agriculture and the economy more broadly.

The Government of Ukraine has also actively promoted the School Nutrition Reform in different international fora. Ukraine organized the first European Regional School Meals Summit in Kyiv in November 2024, where more than 500 participants, including representatives of more than 20 countries, gathered.

The School Nutrition Reform is implemented in the broader context of digital reforms. In 2022, Ukraine reviewed procurement legislation to improve the public system and make public procurement information more transparent. Public purchases, including for school food, now take place through an electronic marketplace, *Prozorro Market*, carefully monitored and controlled by the relevant auditing bodies.

Prozorro Market is an e-procurement platform initially developed in 2016 by Ukrainian civil activists and other international partners. It was later adopted by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. It simplifies the procurement process for government customers by providing a centralized catalogue of pre-qualified suppliers and products. This system allows for faster procurement cycles, as it eliminates the need for lengthy tender documentation and supplier qualification processes.

Case study 9

Guatemala goes digital: new school meals mobile application boosts school meal programme

In Guatemala, the Ministry of Education and WFP developed an innovative mobile application that connects smallholder farmers with the national school meal programme – the country's largest social protection initiative. The app enables parent organizations in schools to place orders for nutritious, locally produced food directly from certified smallholder farmers. The app has been validated by over 500 farmers and 840 schools, aiming to streamline the procurement process, promote transparency and ensure that fresh products reach students in an efficient manner.

Smallholder farmers benefit significantly from this initiative. The app reduces the need for in-person visits to schools to secure contracts, saving time and effort, while expanding farmers' economic opportunities by shortening the value chain. Farmers can now view and respond to food requests from nearby schools, ensuring a more stable income and better support for their families. This system not only improves the nutritional quality of school meals, but also strengthens ties to the land and preserves cultural traditions.

Since 2017, Guatemala has committed to revitalizing the local economy by sourcing 70 percent of school food from family farmers. This approach has played a key role in preventing malnutrition and promoting healthy eating habits. The mobile application developed by the Ministry of Education and WFP exemplifies how technology can bridge the gap between smallholder agriculture and schools, fostering sustainable development and food security.

Case study 10

Lesotho deepens multisectoral commitment to home-grown school feeding through updated school feeding policy

In 2023, Lesotho reinforced its dedication to school meals through the review of the National School Feeding Policy to strengthen multisectoral collaboration and prioritize home-grown approaches. The revised policy was approved in 2024 and builds on Lesotho's first school feeding policy issued as early as 2014. It reflects a vision of a sustainable programme that ensures nutritious daily meals to learners using locally sourced food, implemented entirely by national actors.

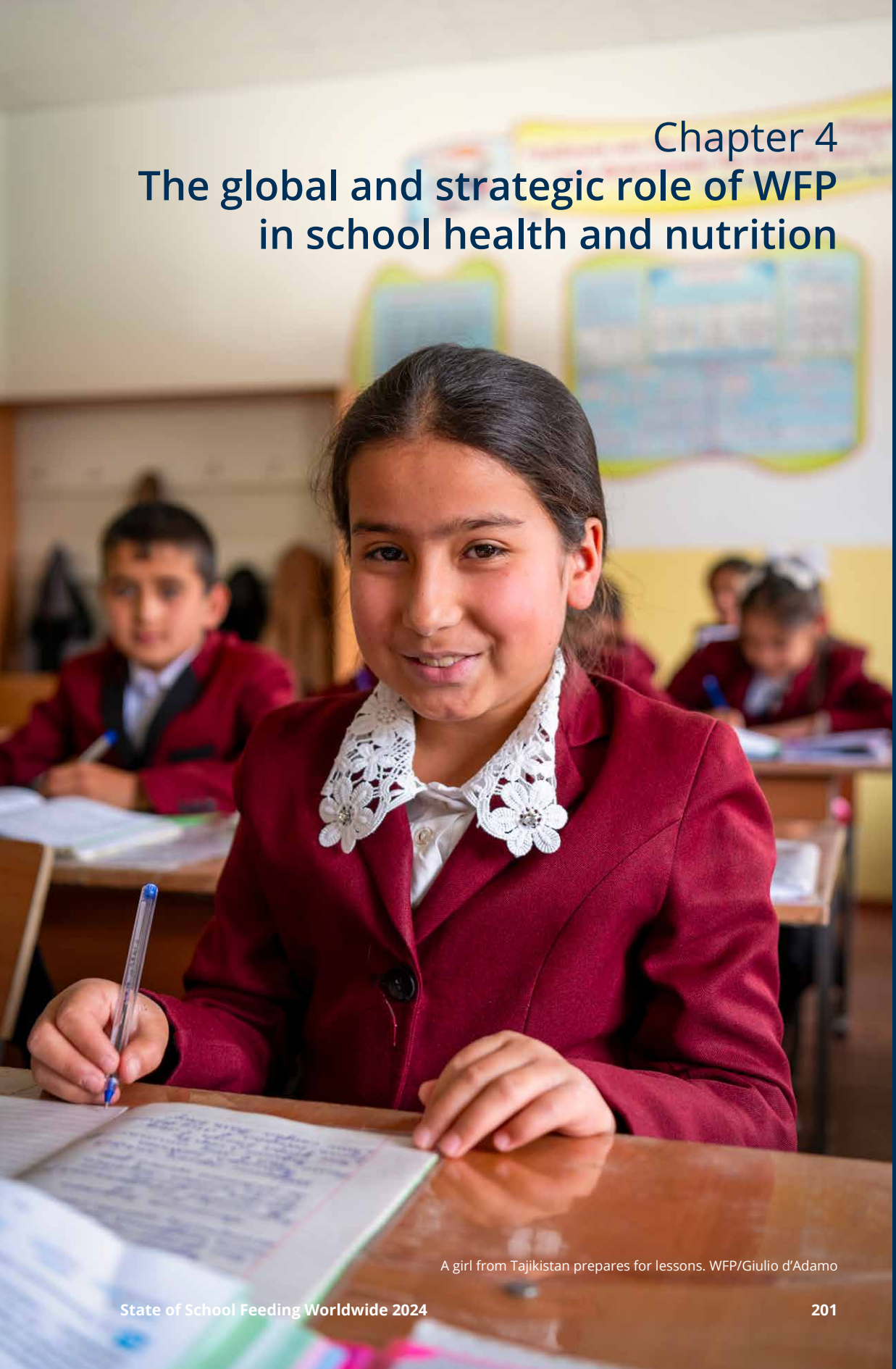
A hallmark of the new policy is its emphasis on creating stable markets for local farmers and stimulating rural economies. Anchored in a multisectoral framework, the policy aligns education, health, agriculture, trade and social development objectives, promoting improved learning, food security and poverty reduction, and seeking shared ownership of the programme by all sectors.

The National School Feeding Policy's institutional framework proposes a multi-sectoral steering committee led by the Ministry of Education and Training, bringing together key ministries and stakeholders. It sets directives for shared budgeting and financial sustainability, including developing legal mechanisms to ring-fence funds for school meals and mobilizing resources through inter-ministerial collaboration and community participation.

In 2023, WFP contributed to shaping this review process, supporting the Ministry of Education and Training to validate the policy with key national stakeholders; convening parliamentarians for high-level advocacy; and helping to establish a multisectoral coordination body to harmonize school meal activities, avoid duplication and improve efficiency.

As Lesotho continues to position school meals as a driver of development and human capital, it exemplifies how coordinated policy, local food systems and advocacy can catalyse transformative change.

Chapter 4
The global and strategic role of WFP in school health and nutrition



A girl from Tajikistan prepares for lessons. WFP/Giulio d'Adamo

WFP's role and policy on school meals has evolved and matured over the last 20 years, making school meals one of the organization's flagship programmes and one of its best documented and evidence-based programme areas. In 2020, WFP took deliberate steps to strengthen and more clearly define its leadership role in school meals globally by launching a ten-year strategy that was expected to change the way WFP:

- worked and acted in partnership; sharpening its advocacy, convening and influencing capacities so it could become a facilitator of global, regional and country efforts on school meals and school health and nutrition; and
- worked with governments, increasing the sustainability and institutionalization of its efforts through a better understanding of national priorities and challenges, better use of evidence and an enhanced focus on strengthening national systems and plans.

Five years on, this chapter presents data and qualitative information to assess progress on the implementation and take up of the strategy. Overall, the information shows how WFP has evolved by placing governments at the centre of its efforts; stepping up its role as a convener and facilitator of partnerships; and investing in its capacities to provide technical assistance and policy support. This publication includes some indicators and data that are not tracked by WFP in its corporate results framework, illustrating how additional investments in measurement are needed to fully understand the extent of WFP's contribution to this area of work.

One of the most important outcomes of WFP's ten-year strategy is the School Meals Coalition. Established in 2021, the Coalition stands out for its innovative approach to multilateral collaboration. Taking a systems and multisector approach, the Coalition is a network with more than 108 governments (rather than the UN system) as its centre. It is an evolving community that shares good practices and optimizes cooperation between countries to support an upscaling strategy.

As its secretariat, WFP plays a supporting role, helping to create the conditions for the Coalition to function and thrive. As envisioned in the strategy, WFP's shift from transactional or operational partnerships to more strategic and collaborative approaches has led to a vibrant ecosystem of more than 140 partners that interact and leverage each other's capacities. The Coalition's partners now include: UN agencies, international financial institutions and development banks (including the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank), NGOs, research institutions, foundations and many more (a full list of School Meals Coalition partners is included in Chapter 2).

A renewed commitment towards the institutionalization of school meal programmes has led to a substantial increase in nationally owned and sustainable programmes, with WFP support, and a shift in WFP's own operational portfolio. For example, in 2020, 40 percent of WFP-supported low-income countries did not have a school meals policy and had not yet decided to prioritize the programme or embed it in national structures.
By 2024, that figure had reduced to 15 percent leaving few low-income countries without a national policy or legal framework in place. In most cases, the drafting and design of these documents was undertaken with WFP's technical assistance and support.

Overall, total school meal expenditure (in absolute dollar value) across WFP-supported countries has risen by more than US$187.5 million since 2020. There is an increase in funding across all categories of funding sources, including an increase of nearly US$140 million in national budget expenditure, reflecting the growth in government investment in countries with WFP presence and support.

In 2024, a total of 139 million children received school meals in 78 WFP-supported countries,[33] up from 108 million in 2020. WFP direct operational investment has remained relatively stable during this time, which means that the increase of 31 million children receiving school meals over the last four years is primarily due to an expansion of government-owned and funded programmes, supported by WFP.

[33] The figure refers specifically to countries where WFP supports school meal programmes. More generally, WFP is present in more than 78 countries globally.



A student from Mozambique learns about local foods.
WFP/Ana Mato Hombre

Through its technical assistance efforts, WFP's presence in 78 countries means that it can indirectly and efficiently reach and improve the conditions of these 139 million children, for example, by helping governments improve the quality and diversity of the food they provide through school meals and/or implementing additional quality enhancements such as food fortification.

When looking at direct operational assistance, the composition of WFP's portfolio has also changed, again reflecting the shift towards government ownership and sustainability as forecast in the strategy. In 2013, WFP reached approximately 20 million children with school meals, distributed evenly between fragile/low-income contexts (10 million children) and middle-income contexts (the other 10 million children). Today, WFP has almost halved the number of children it supports in middle-income countries, reflecting the commitment to national ownership and gradual handover, while scaling up support in fragile contexts where operational capacities are weak. In 2023, WFP provided support to approximately 21 million children, with the majority in fragile/low-income category settings (approximately 15 million).

This shift in focus underscores WFP's evolving role in supporting the most vulnerable and highlights its commitment to adapting programming to address the complex realities of fragile and low-capacity contexts. In response to the growing scale and intensity of emergencies, WFP is also leveraging its operational capabilities to support governments in using school meal programmes in fragile and conflict-affected areas. In countries with low capacity or high vulnerability, WFP continues to provide high-quality, context-driven programmes while ensuring safeguarding measures are in place to protect children, especially girls. WFP's future programming will focus on integrating humanitarian, development and peace efforts by enhancing national capacities; promoting home-grown and climate-resilient approaches; and piloting multisectoral interventions to strengthen emergency preparedness and recovery, with the ultimate goal of transitioning its school meal operations to national ownership.

These efforts and the evolution of WFP's approach were formalized in WFP's new School Meals Policy, which was approved by WFP's Executive Board in late 2024. The policy reflects the growing ambition of governments worldwide, sharpens WFP's approach and institutionalizes its global leadership role, recognizing the School Meals Coalition as the driving force behind international efforts. Over the next few years, WFP will continue to play a leadership role in this growing policy area, together with an extensive partnership network. This chapter unpacks how WFP is responding to the evolving and thriving ecosystem that it helped to create.

4.1 WFP's role as the School Meals Coalition secretariat and the expansion of its advocacy capacities

Leveraging its global presence and expertise, WFP can influence decision making and policy setting at global, regional and local levels, prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable people. A compelling example of the catalytic power of WFP's advocacy is the School Meals Coalition, which has been instrumental in driving forward the school meals agenda in countries and positioning the topic on the development agenda globally.

Since 2021, WFP has augmented its school meals advocacy, communications and partnerships capacity within the School Meals and Social Protection Service at WFP headquarters in Rome. This dedicated team serves as the secretariat for the School Meals Coalition, with strategic guidance from the task force. Complementing this centralized capacity, WFP also provides support to Coalition member countries through efforts at regional and country levels.

As the School Meals Coalition continues to grow, now counting 108 member states and over 140 partner organizations, the secretariat, like the root system of a forest, helps to feed, animate and orchestrate action across the entire system. It maintains and develops relationships, manages the flow of information and creates opportunities for members to connect to each other. This includes outreach to new members; organizing periodic meetings and events; keeping stakeholders informed, empowered and motivated to engage with key advocacy and communications opportunities; and helping to connect initiatives and avoid duplication of efforts (for a full description of how the Coalition works see Chapter 2).

In close collaboration with the WFP global network of offices and staff, the secretariat provides initial support to regional initiatives and networks, together with regional bodies/organizations and existing regional partnerships, with a focus on regional peer-to-peer learning and support.

A local farmer in Madagascar supplies tomatoes to schools. WFP/Caitkie Vaghjee



WFP undertakes the following roles as the secretariat for the School Meals Coalition:

1. **Strategic direction:** Since 2021, the secretariat has provided the overall strategic direction for the Coalition, under the guidance of the three co-chairs and task force. Although this effort is led by governments, WFP provides the strategic foundation for the Coalition as the lead international organization on school meals. This includes publishing the fourth edition of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* report (past editions include 2013, 2020 and 2022) to track the situation globally, understanding the key bottlenecks and challenges for implementation, and positioning the issue on global agendas. The secretariat has helped the various initiatives to establish themselves and has launched and facilitated coordination among them. The secretariat provides substantive support to each initiative, ensuring coordination with various stakeholders in the Coalition's ecosystem, including WFP's country and regional offices.

2. **Coordination and dialogue setting:** The secretariat supports Coalition member states and partners, maintains and develops relationships, and keeps partners informed and connected. A large part of the dialogue and agenda setting happens through regular meetings of various parts of the Coalition. Since 2021, the secretariat has organized 46 virtual meetings of the task force, the working group and the partners' group (combined) to strategically define the Coalition's work and set priorities, showcase country efforts and strengthen connections. Once a year, there is an in-person meeting at the ministerial level of the task force or of the Coalition as a whole. Since 2021, the secretariat has organized two task force meetings (in Helsinki 2022 and Nairobi 2024) and a summit of the entire Coalition (Paris 2023), with Brazil hosting the next summit in 2025. These events are political and strategic, creating momentum that is then carried across the Coalition system, informing country, regional and global priorities.

3. **Communications and network management:** The secretariat manages the Coalition's website, social media and newsletter, ensuring that all members and partners have access to key documents, calendars of events and assets for effective advocacy and to build connections. The secretariat has helped to secure coverage from global outlets such as CNN, The Guardian, The Economist, Associated Press and Forbes, among many more regional, national and language-based outlets. In 2024, the Coalition's social media covered 70 percent of all Coalition member states. Amplification by stakeholders (including ministers, ambassadors and multilateral organizations) expanded the reach and impact of communication efforts, demonstrating strong alignment with the Coalition's vision and objectives.

4. **Advocacy and policy dialogue:** The secretariat encourages and provides support to countries in formulating their national commitments to the School Meals Coalition. To date, 54 countries have submitted national commitments to the Coalition, which include more than 400 actions across policy, financing, institutional set up, programme design, coverage, evidence and data, and advocacy and partnerships. Most countries align across at least three of these categories and many express determination to achieve universal coverage by 2030. Through WFP's network of country, regional and global offices, the secretariat supports countries to enhance the scale and quality of their school meal programmes by providing technical support, and connecting countries with suitable partners, accelerating assistance and fostering peer-to-peer engagement.

   At the regional level, the Coalition has gained significant traction. The secretariat has supported the African Union and the emergence of regional networks. Regional dialogues and events have led to the creation of regional school meal networks, where countries shared best practices and supported each other's commitments. Examples include the school meals events organized by ECOWAS in 2023 and 2024; the launch of the East Africa regional school meals network in Rwanda; the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Meeting hosted by Brazil in 2023 and Mexico in 2024; the European Summit hosted by Ukraine; and the Southeast Asia Summit hosted by Cambodia in November 2024. Regional meetings were also held in Southern Africa.

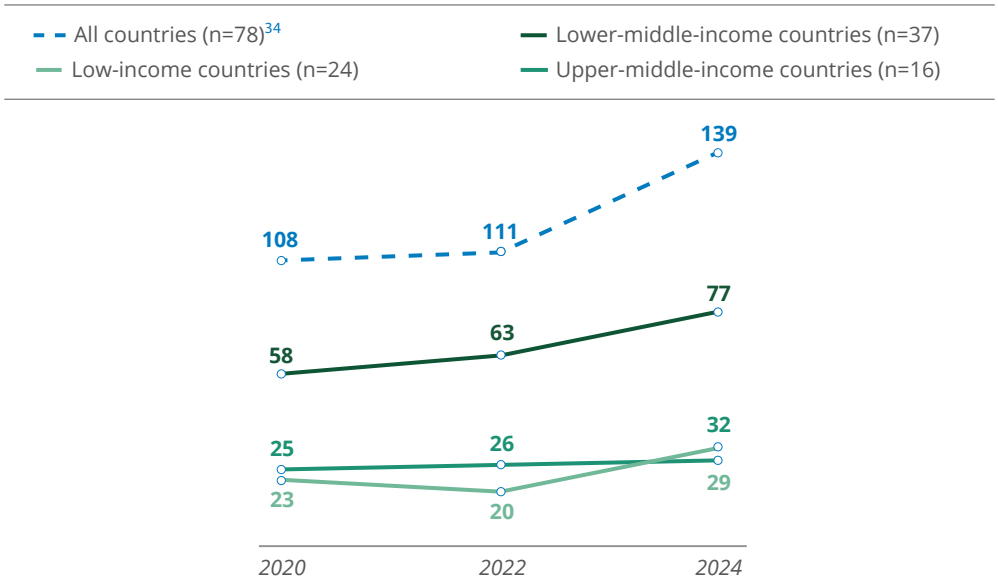
4.2 WFP's contribution to the expansion and strengthening of national school meal programmes

In 2024, a total of 139 million children received school meals in 78 WFP-supported countries, up from 111 million children in 2022 (see Figure 4.1). Figure 4.2 shows this expansion – driven by government-led programmes as well as those implemented with WFP and partner support – was most significant in lower-middle-income countries, where 14 million more children were reached; followed by increases of 12 million in low-income countries and 3 million in upper-middle-income countries. This increase is partially attributable to WFP's technical support and advocacy roles, and the global momentum created by the School Meals Coalition.

Figure 4.1

Number of children (in millions) reached by school meal programmes in countries supported by WFP

Over 139 million children received school meals in 78 WFP-supported countries in 2024 which is an increase from previous years.



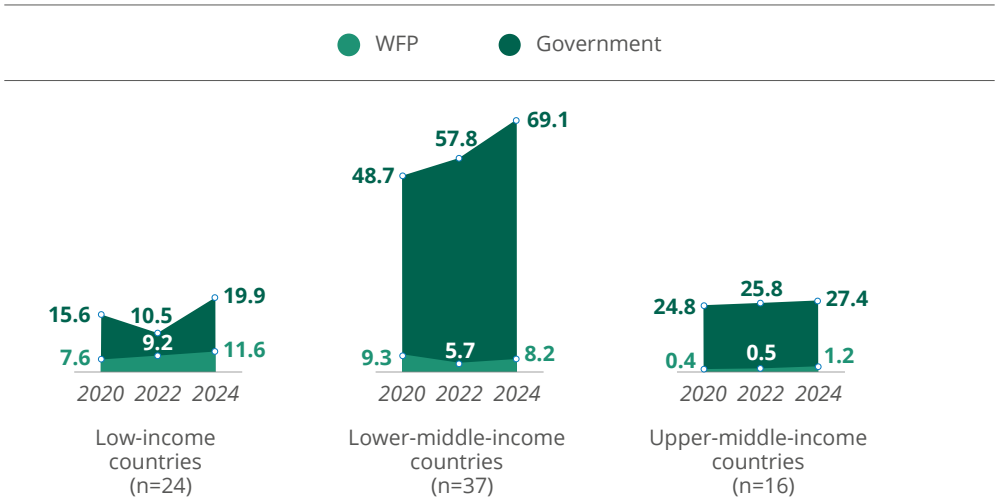
Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys, WFP (estimates, Annual Country Reports), World Bank (2018).

[34] Venezuela is included in the total (n=78) but not in the income level breakdown, as it does not have an assigned income level category.

Figure 4.2

Number of children (in millions) reached by school meal programmes in countries supported by WFP (2020–2024) by income group

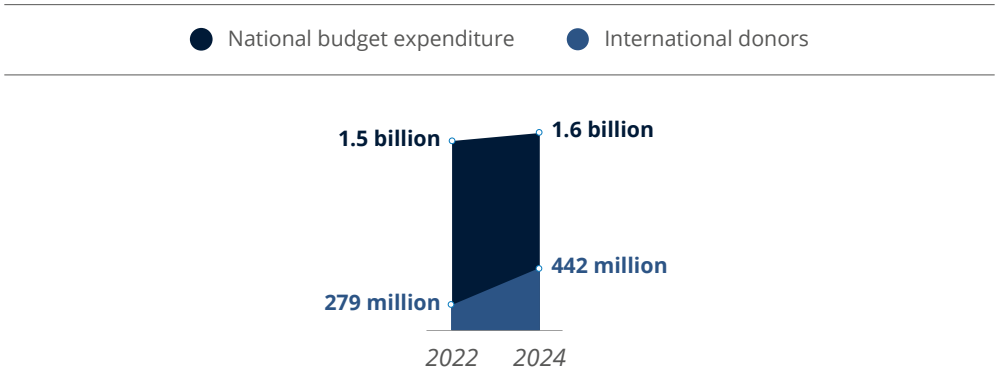
The scale-up of school meal programmes, including those implemented with WFP and partner support, was most significant in lower-middle-income countries, where 14 million more children were reached.



Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys, WFP (estimates, Annual Country Reports), World Bank (2018).

National investments in school meals have also grown. Twenty-four WFP-supported countries increased their domestic funding for school meals between 2022 and 2024. Figure 4.3 shows the breakdown by funding sources and Figure 4.4 by income categories. Overall, across WFP-supported countries, total school meal expenditure – in absolute dollar value – rose by more than US$240 million between 2022 and 2024. In absolute terms, there is an increase in funding across all categories of funding sources, including an increase of nearly US$65 million in national budget expenditure. However, during this period, the largest increase in funding was from international donors whose contributions in 2024 were substantially higher compared to 2022.

Figure 4.3
Investment in school meal programmes in countries supported by WFP
Total investment in school meal programmes rose by more than US$240 million between 2022 and 2024.[35]



Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys (2021, 2024).

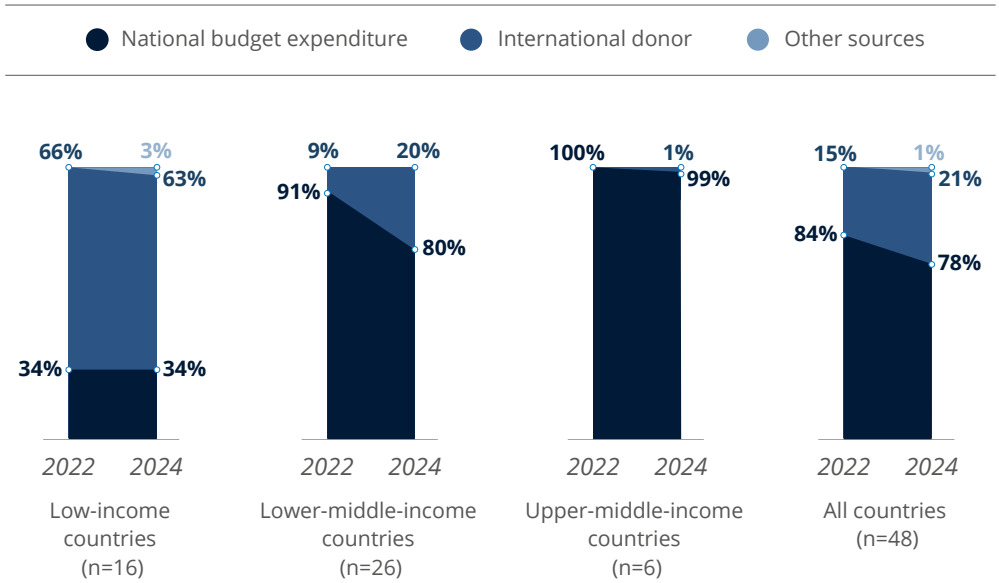
Figure 4.4 shows a modest downward trend in the percentage of funding coming from national budget expenditure and a corresponding slight increase in the percentage coming from international donors. This trend was most pronounced in lower-middle-income countries, which saw an 11-percentage point shift towards donor funding, while changes in upper-middle and low-income countries were much smaller.

[35] Figure 4.3 presents funding contributions from national government budgets and international donors only. The total investment increase figure of US$240 million also considers additional sources such as national donors, private sector contributions, and other sources which are not represented in the figure.

Figure 4.4

Change in funding sources in countries supported by WFP

Domestic funding for school meals in lower-middle-income countries has slightly decreased, while international donor support has slightly increased.



Sources: Direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys (2021, 2024).

With WFP support, programmes in low and lower-middle-income countries are being progressively institutionalized under national governments, while WFP continues to implement school meal programmes in fragile and conflict settings. To support growing national ownership, WFP has provided technical assistance, policy analysis and capacity strengthening, helping countries such as Armenia, Iraq, Cambodia and Benin transition to increasingly nationally owned and financed school meal programmes.

WFP has also facilitated South-South and Triangular Cooperation; seconded staff to governments; advocated for the expansion and improvement of national school meal programmes; facilitated regional and national multisectoral consultations; conducted national capacity assessments; and convened partners to support governments.

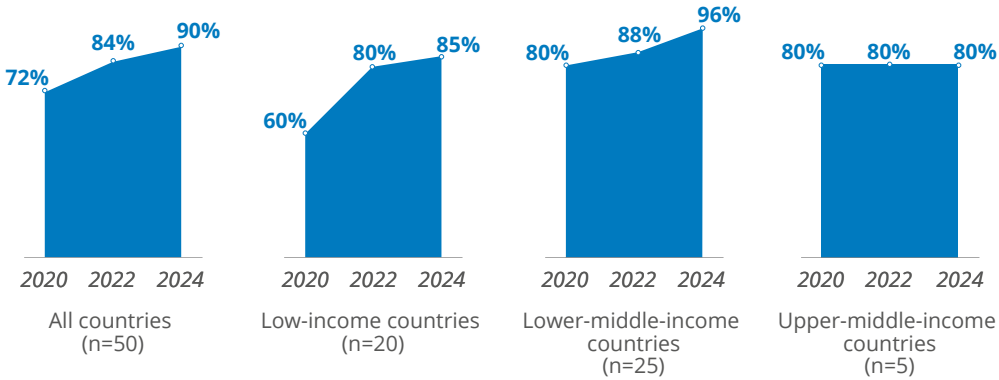
Sustained policy engagement by WFP and partners has contributed to strengthened national frameworks. Based on the most recent data, 59 countries (where WFP supported school meal programmes) have adopted national policies, laws or strategies, representing 92 percent of countries with available information (n=64). Since the last *State of School Feeding Worldwide* publication in 2022, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Senegal and Ukraine have introduced new school meals policies, signalling increased political will and deeper institutionalization.

Figure 4.5 illustrates the changes in national policy frameworks across income groups. While there is an overall 6 percentage point increase from 2022 to 2024 in countries with school meal policies, the growth is especially prominent among lower-middle-income countries, which saw an 8 percentage point increase, while upper-middle-income countries maintained an already high rate of 80 percent.

Figure 4.5

Change in policy frameworks in countries supported by WFP

Increase in the adoption of a school meals policy is prominent among lower-middle-income countries, which saw an 8 percentage point increase from 2022 to 2024, while upper-middle-income countries maintained an already high rate of 80 percent.



Sources: GCNF Global Surveys, WFP.

WFP has also collaborated with regional bodies, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to issue guidelines on school meals and school health and nutrition, which feature local procurement as a key component[36] (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1
The ASEAN Minimum Standards and Guidelines for the School Nutrition Package

The Minimum Standards and Guidelines for the School Nutrition Package, launched in 2024, provide a comprehensive framework to enhance the nutritional well-being of school-aged children across ASEAN member states. Developed with support from WFP and UNICEF, the guidelines outline essential standards for implementing, monitoring and enforcing school nutrition programmes. The package emphasizes five key action areas: access to nutritious foods, a healthy school environment, health and nutrition services, nutrition literacy and promoting regular physical activity. School meals are a central component, designed to ensure that children receive balanced diets that support their physical and cognitive development. By sourcing food locally, the guidelines also aim to encourage ASEAN governments to boost local economies and support smallholder farmers. The standards advocate for multisectoral collaboration, involving education, health, agriculture and social welfare sectors, to create a holistic approach to child nutrition.
This initiative reflects regional bodies' commitment, especially ASEAN's commitment, to addressing malnutrition and fostering a healthier future for their young populations.

[36] *https://asean.org/book/minimum-standards-and-guidelines-for-the-asean-school-nutrition-package/*

Support for government information systems

Two examples of WFP-supported government information systems are provided below.

Jordan's National School Feeding Programme is implemented by the Ministry of Education with WFP's support. It is the largest safety net targeting children in Jordan, supporting 520,000 students with school meals and snacks on a daily basis. The National School Feeding Programme is implemented using two modalities: (i) fortified date bars; and (ii) the Healthy Meal model. The Healthy Meal model procures ingredients from local smallholder farmers and bakers. Ingredients are cleaned and packaged in ten community-based kitchens that employ 250 vulnerable women. The Healthy Meal model includes a nutrition-sensitive, age-appropriate Social Behaviour Change curriculum that uses interactive games and messages to raise awareness among children and their parents of good nutrition habits.

In line with the priorities of Jordan's National School Feeding Strategy (2021–2025), WFP supports various capacity and systems strengthening initiatives to gradually handover the programme to the Ministry of Education. This has included the development of a school meal module within the Ministry of Education's data management system, EMIS. WFP partnered with UNESCO and the Government of Jordan to design the module in line with the National School Feeding Programme monitoring framework; and conducted a training of trainers course to equip staff and directorate-level focal points across the country on how to properly use and populate the system. The school meal module will help strengthen data quality and monitoring of the national programme, enabling the Government of Jordan to make evidence-based decisions.

WFP's Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean provides technical assistance to countries in the region to integrate school meals data into educational databases, including digitalization support for the education sector in Jamaica.

Box 4.2

Southern African Development Community School Health and Nutrition Toolkit

In 2024, the Southern African Development Community unveiled its School Health and Nutrition Toolkit, transforming the community's School Meals Guidelines and AUDA-NEPAD Home Grown School Feeding Guidelines into actionable advice for member states. The toolkit offers comprehensive guidance, tools and resources to help the community's member states develop effective national mechanisms and action plans to enhance school health and nutrition programmes. Designed for the education sector with a multisectoral approach, the toolkit primarily targets policymakers and programme managers in education and other key sectors involved in improving children's education, health and nutrition.

Developed by the Southern African Development Community's secretariat in collaboration with WFP, FAO, UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA and AUDA-NEPAD, the toolkit aligns with the WHO Health Promoting Schools Framework and the Global Standards for Health-Promoting Schools. It also incorporates good practices from the Focusing Resources on Effective School Health (FRESH) and SABER-SHSF frameworks. The toolkit provides evidence-based recommendations and practical tools to help member states identify and address gaps in school health and nutrition policies and programmes.

4.3 WFP's operational support to countries

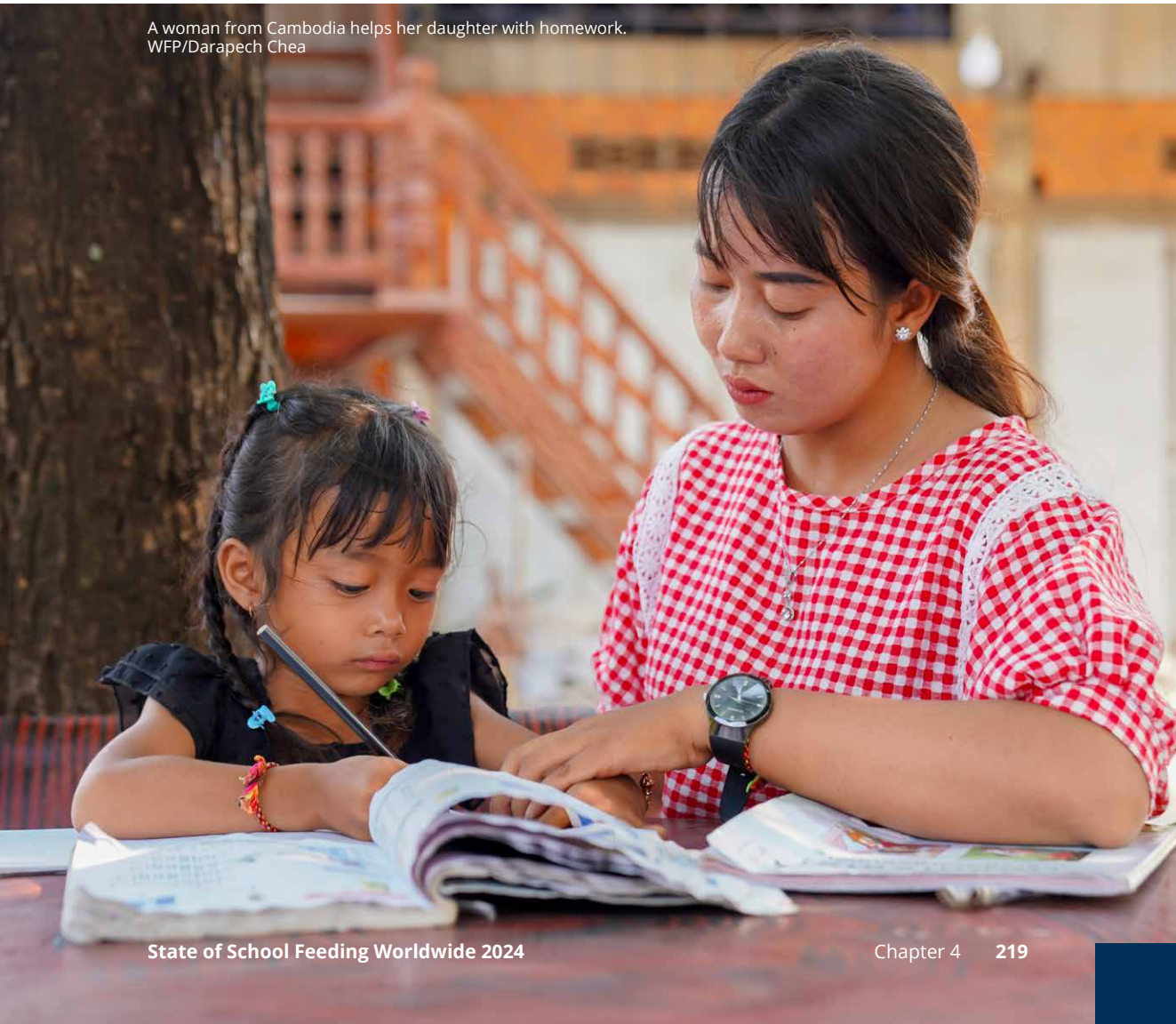
In 2023, WFP worked with governments in 61 countries to directly reach 21.4 million schoolchildren – 48 percent of whom were girls – with nutritious school meals, take-home rations and cash-based transfers (see Map 4.1 for the geographical reach of WFP's school meal programmes). This is almost 6 million more children than in the last *State of School Feeding Worldwide* report. This increase may mean that WFP's operations are recovering as pandemic-related challenges ease, but also indicate the increased need for WFP's direct support, often in fragile contexts.

Of the 61 countries, 40 were experiencing crisis and/or receiving humanitarian assistance. In such settings, WFP continues to scale up its operational support, remaining agile in responding to changes in context and implementing school meals as a critical safety net. Since 2013, WFP has increased direct assistance to cover approximately 50 percent more children. For example, in Yemen, where WFP implements one of its largest school meal operations, WFP provided fortified date bars/biscuits and on-site meals to 1.9 million children in 2023. The programme reached over 4,600 schools – its largest coverage yet – resuming in 129 schools that were previously inaccessible due to conflict and expanding to 104 new schools.[37]

Over the past few years, the number of children affected by crises has grown. Despite the increased coverage of WFP's programmes, funding to support humanitarian efforts in emergencies is not keeping pace with growing need.

[37] WFP Yemen Annual Country Report 2023.

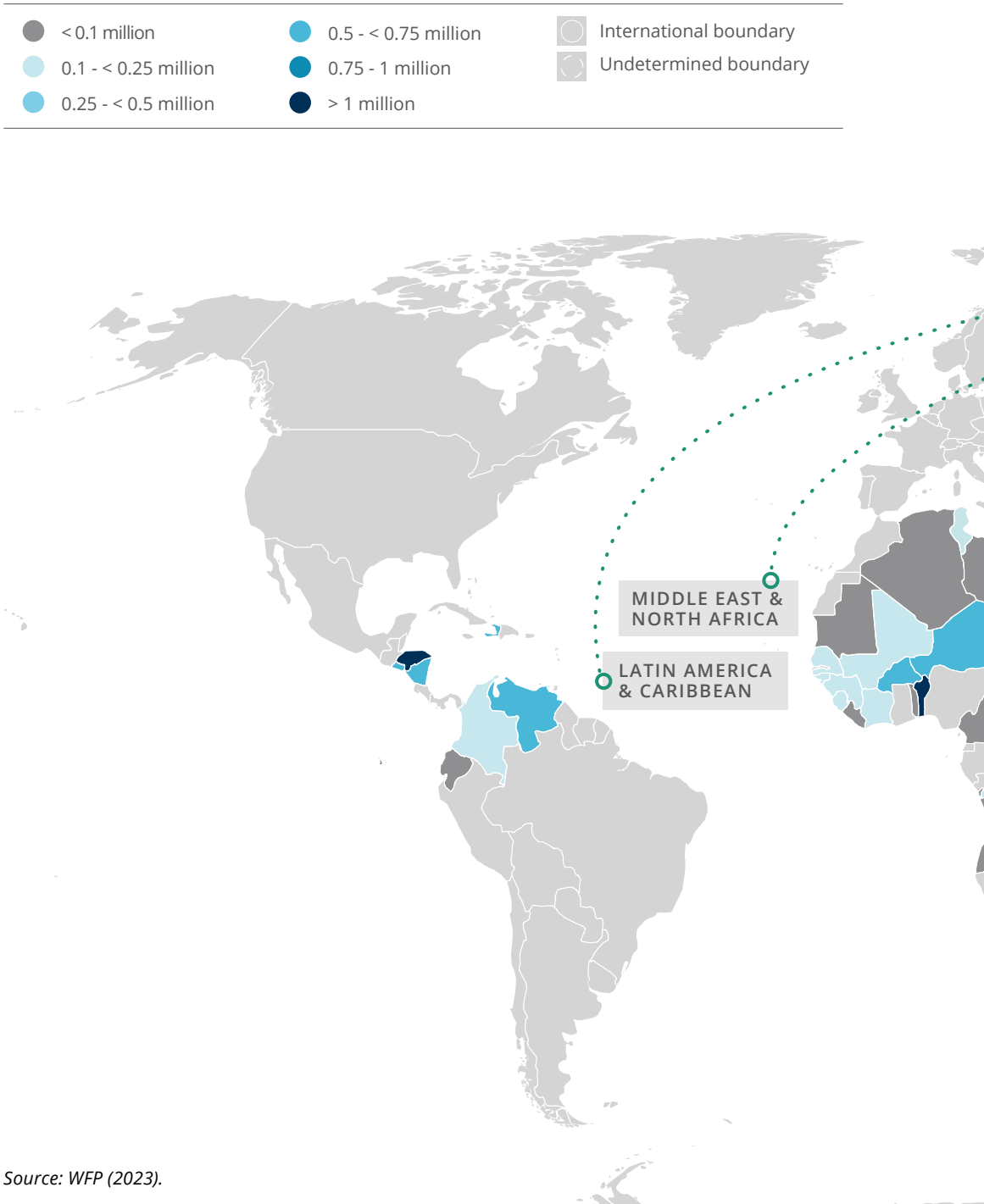
In middle-income countries, WFP prioritizes strengthening national programmes and transitioning to greater national ownership in line with the organization's School Feeding Strategy 2020–2030 and 2024 School Meals Policy. Through technical assistance, WFP has strengthened national capacities, leading to significant increases in national funding and school meals coverage in many countries, e.g. Rwanda and Armenia (see country case study 2 and 12, respectively). WFP has almost halved direct implementation of programmes in middle-income countries since 2013. In countries such as India and Ghana, WFP primarily works through technical assistance to the government. In 2023, WFP's support included establishing strategic partnerships and providing expertise for innovative initiatives to integrate local procurement with links to smallholder farmers, address nutrient gaps and develop local value chains.



A woman from Cambodia helps her daughter with homework.
WFP/Darapech Chea

Map 4.1

Overview of WFP-implemented school meal programmes around the world in 2023[38]



Source: WFP (2023).

[38] Discrepancy between sum of regional figures and the global figure of 21.4 million is due to rounding.

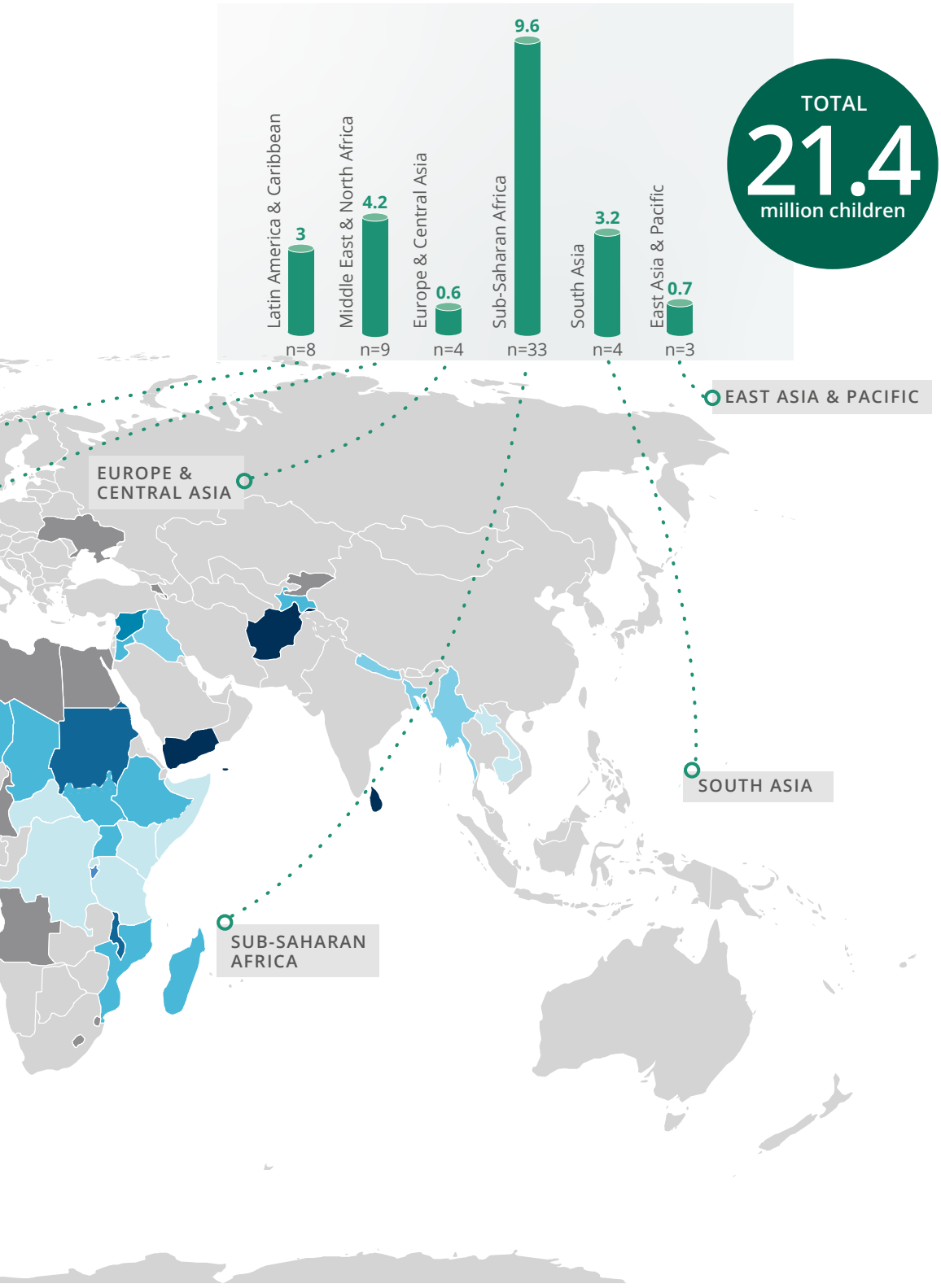
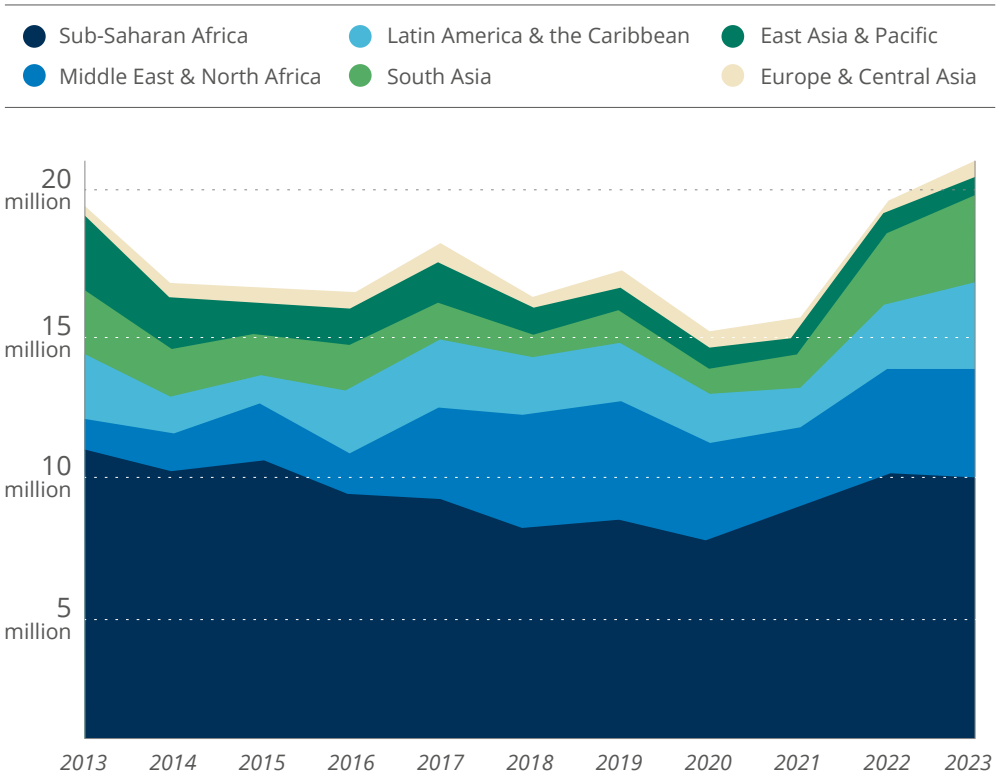

TOTAL
21.4
million children
Latin America & Caribbean
3
n=8
Middle East & North Africa
4.2
n=9
Europe & Central Asia
0.6
n=4
Sub-Saharan Africa
9.6
n=33
South Asia
3.2
n=4
East Asia & Pacific
0.7
n=3
EAST ASIA & PACIFIC
EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA
SOUTH ASIA
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Figure 4.6

Evolution of WFP school meal direct beneficiaries between 2013 and 2023 (by region)

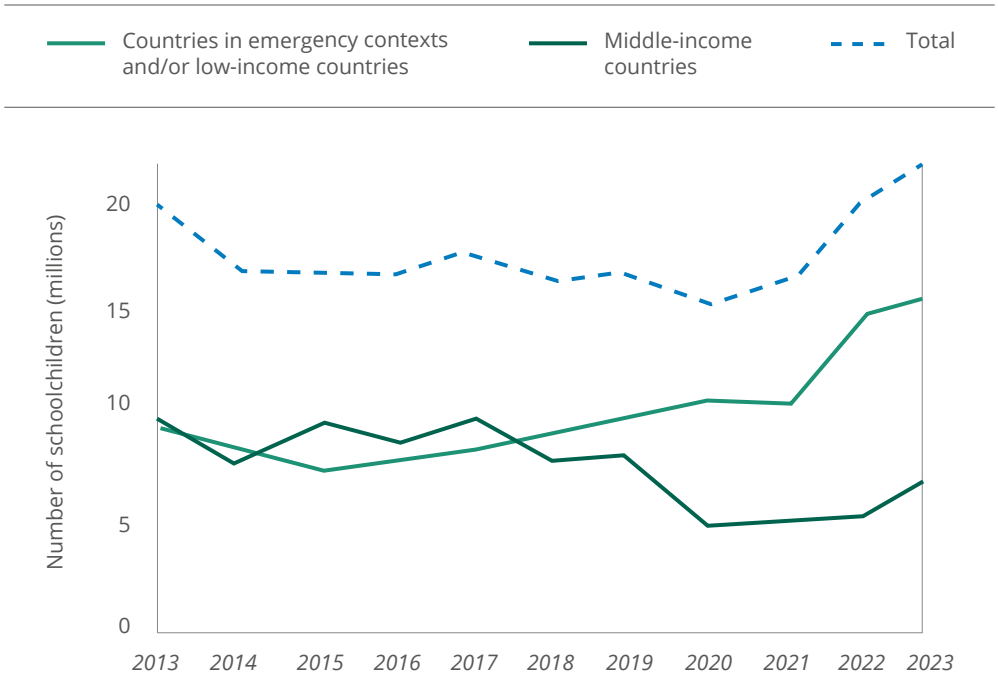
There has been a continuous increase in the number of schoolchildren reached by WFP school meals since 2020. In 2023, this number reached its highest in a decade at 21.4 million children, the largest share of which continues to be in sub-Saharan Africa.



Source: WFP (2013-2023).

Figure 4.7 shows trends in the number of schoolchildren directly reached by WFP school meals between 2013 and 2023, disaggregated by country context. While total reach remained relatively stable until 2021, there was a sharp increase thereafter, rising to over 21 million children by 2023 driven largely by expanded support in emergency and low-income settings. In these contexts, WFP's reach has grown steadily since 2018, with a notable jump between 2021 and 2022, reflecting the organization's response to growing needs amid overlapping crises and conflicts. In contrast, the number of children reached directly by WFP in middle-income countries declined sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic and has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels. This trend reflects WFP's strategic shift towards supporting nationally led programmes, as low-income countries transition to middle-income status and as countries strengthen their financial, institutional and technical capacities to manage and sustain school meals independently.

Figure 4.7
Number of schoolchildren directly reached by WFP school meals over time (2013–2023), by country context



Source: WFP (2013-2023).

Box 4.3
WFP's school meal activities in 2023

WFP provided school meals, snacks and cash-based transfers to 21.4 million children, 48 percent of whom were girls.

Number of schoolchildren receiving assistance by WFP regional bureau:[39]
- Asia and the Pacific: 4.5 million (2.1 million girls)
- Middle East, Northern Africa, Eastern Europe: 4.2 million (1.9 million girls)
- West Africa: 4.3 million (2.1 million girls)
- East Africa: 3.2 million (1.6 million girls)
- Southern Africa: 2.1 million (1.1 girls)
- Latin America and the Caribbean: 3.0 million (1.5 million girls).

In 2023, WFP implemented or supported school meal programmes in 81 countries (4 through direct implementation, 20 with only technical assistance, and 57 with a combination of direct implementation and technical assistance).

WFP supported governments in 59 countries on home-grown school meals, including through programme design, implementation and policy development.

[39] Discrepancy between sum of regional figures and the global figure of 21.4 million is due to rounding.

4.4 WFP's role in implementing school meals in emergencies

WFP delivers school meals during emergencies, helping children in crisis-affected areas receive essential nutrition support and continued education where possible. A *Synthesis Evaluation on Emergency School Feeding*, published in May 2022,[40] revealed that school meals improved food security, school attendance and learning outcomes in emergency settings. The synthesis also found that programmes provided a sense of normalcy and stability for children amid the chaos of conflict and displacement. Key findings highlighted the importance of multisectoral collaboration, involving governments, local communities and international partners, to expand the reach of these programmes and make them sustainable. Despite challenges such as funding constraints and logistical hurdles, WFP's emergency school meal programmes have demonstrated substantial benefits, underscoring the need for continued investment and support to maximize their impact.

Governments recognize that their own school meal programmes can help mitigate the impact of disasters for children and their families. The use of school meals in crises, such as during the COVID-19 lockdowns and the more recent global food price crisis, has four main benefits in protecting children and families from shocks:

- **Stable access:** Year-round access to school meals builds the resilience of children and their families, enhancing their long-term capacity to withstand, cope and recover from disasters.

- **Coping mechanism:** When protected and sustained in times of shock, school meal programmes can ensure children have continued access to food even when household resources are strained, or other income sources have collapsed. This can prevent negative coping strategies, such as selling off household resources, and safeguards investments in children's health and education.

[40] *https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000141602/download/?_ga=2.255338123.202682972.1732527057-1715565503.1706110063*



A boy in the Democratic Republic of Congo eats a meal in school. WFP/Vincent Tremeau

- **Adaptation:** School meals can be adapted during shocks to accommodate new vulnerabilities beyond their regular scope. Existing school meal programmes can be used as an entry point to provide essential food assistance to family members and others in the community. Adaptations might include altering delivery methods, such as adding take-home rations or community distribution points.

- **Social protection:** Evidence of the benefits of school meal programmes in disasters can be a powerful incentive for governments to incorporate them as a regular social protection instrument. In countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, school meal programmes that initially launched as emergency responses later expanded, continuing beyond the initial shock and becoming an integral part of national social protection frameworks.

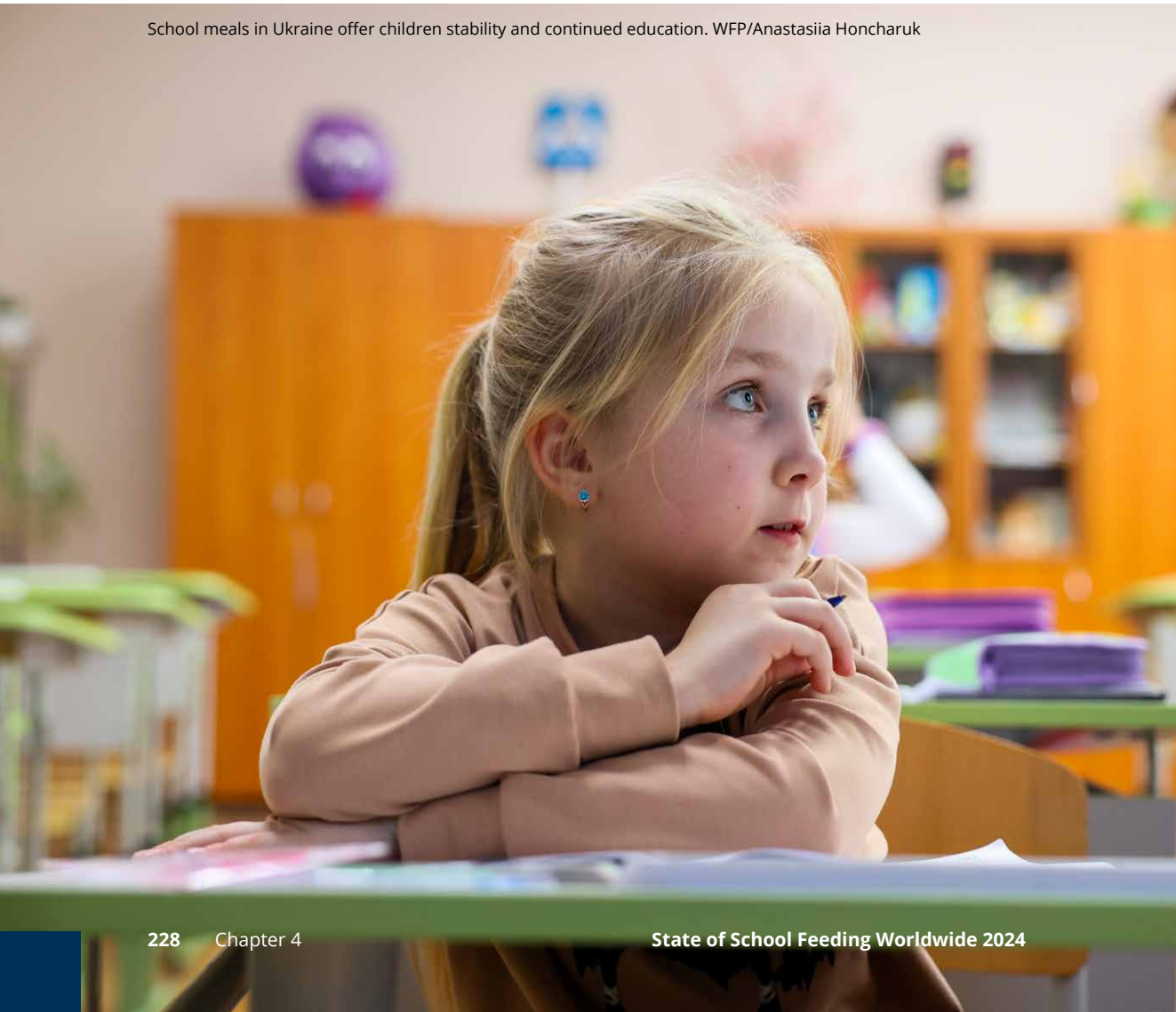
Examples of WFP programmes in emergency contexts include in the Middle East and in North Africa, where despite significant obstacles – such as supply chain disruptions, school infrastructure damage, water shortages, safety risks and limited access – WFP has developed resilient, context-specific school meal programmes often integrated into national safety nets and delivered in partnership with governments, UN agencies, international financial institutions, communities and NGOs. In Yemen, for example, WFP supported 1.5 million children with fortified snacks and launched Healthy Kitchens to provide home-grown school meals to 34,800 children in 2024, working closely with the Global Partnership for Education, the World Bank, UNICEF, Save the Children and other Education Cluster partners. In Syria, over 911,100 children benefited from date bars, fresh meals and cash-based transfers, with school attendance rising to 88 percent. WFP partnered with UNICEF and local NGOs to implement and scale these efforts, including additional support in response to the earthquake and the crisis in Lebanon. In Lebanon, WFP's school meals initiative – supporting 107,000 children, including many Syrian refugees – adapted to conflict disruptions in 2024 by shifting to take-home snacks during remote learning periods. WFP resumed in-school meals following a November 2024 ceasefire, and partnered with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, local NGOs and the French Development Agency, among others. In Gaza, WFP distributed snacks to 117,886 children in UN temporary learning spaces in 2024, with plans to expand operations as access and security conditions permit.

In Sudan (where WFP has implemented school meal programmes since 1969) nearly 25 million people face acute food insecurity, with famine confirmed in several regions and malnutrition rates among children dangerously high. WFP resumed its home-grown school meals initiative in March 2024 using take-home rations in five states, including the Red Sea, where it reached 42,685 students. This approach not only addressed food insecurity but also improved school attendance, especially among girls.

WFP has scaled its operations to support over 565,000 students and staff, procuring 9,000 metric tons of cereals from six farmer organizations, demonstrating the resilience and impact of integrating education, agriculture and community engagement during crises.

To capitalize on the advantages of providing school meals in emergencies, governments must make social protection systems more "shock-responsive". Based on lessons learned from past global efforts, programmes may need to be redesigned to allow for flexible expansion; changing delivery methods; securing contingency funding; developing more innovative partnerships; or developing protocols that enable changes to be triggered in the event of a disaster. In many countries, WFP provides technical assistance to support such policy changes.

School meals in Ukraine offer children stability and continued education. WFP/Anastasiia Honcharuk



4.5 Empowering women and girls through school meals

School meal programmes intervene at multiple levels – individual, household, community, school and national level. They represent a unique opportunity to address the different challenges that boys and girls and children with disabilities face, which prevent them from reaching their full potential. School meals can increase the agency of women and girls and children with disabilities by challenging unequal power relations and discriminatory norms and laws.

From 2022 to 2024, WFP made significant strides to ensure that both girls and boys benefit equally from school meal initiatives. These efforts include targeting the barriers girls face to attend school and continue their education as they get older, as well as interventions to empower women in local food supply chains through the purchase and preparation of school meals. WFP has increasingly used research and evidence to bring the benefits of school meals to all boys and girls, including children with disabilities.

For instance, in Rwanda, WFP conducted an assessment to better understand the nuanced context within which the home-grown school meal programme operates – especially how it may affect boys, girls, men and women differently. The assessment yielded insights on the inequalities within the programme's communities and stakeholders, identified root causes and recommended improvements to programme design. The study demonstrated the importance of analysing how boys, girls, men and women from different groups may be impacted differently by the provision of school meals.

In Mozambique, WFP implements the Combating Absenteeism and Reducing Barriers to Education programme, which delivers locally procured healthy meals and promotes access to education, particularly for girls. The programme focuses on three components:

1. The provision of training to school and community-level actors, with the aim of changing adolescent students' beliefs and behaviours that may be harmful or unfair to girls and boys.

2. The creation and consolidation of "dialogue clubs" to promote conversations between girls and boys around fair treatment. Dialogue clubs aim to create a safe environment for girls and boys where they can learn more about inequalities and how to address them.

3. The distribution of menstrual hygiene management kits to increase girls' comfort and confidence in their daily activities, reducing barriers to school attendance, and to help girls stay in school throughout their adolescence.

The Combating Absenteeism and Reducing Barriers to Education programme highlights how one intervention can combine components that complement and reinforce each other. It also demonstrates how building the capacity of school and community actors is key to changing social norms and attitudes towards equality.

In Malawi, the evaluation of the first phase of the Joint Programme for Girls Education highlighted the importance of bringing men and boys into discussions on girls' rights, not just as observers but as actors with equal responsibility to advance equality and social inclusion. It also emphasized the importance of including boys in project activities that provide visible benefits, such as scholarships, and the need to raise parents' awareness of the importance of their daughters' education.

These examples illustrate that programmes can integrate measures at different stages to address inequality at multiple levels, meeting the most immediate and practical needs of girls, boys, women and men while also triggering changes in agency, social relations and social structures.

Box 4.4

Lessons learned from the Breaking Barriers for Girls' Education project – a multisectoral approach to girls' education in fragile contexts

In Chad and Niger, girls residing in conflict areas face significant barriers to education. These include poverty, food insecurity, early marriage, gender-based violence as well as poor health and nutrition services. Cultural norms and safety concerns further exacerbate the situation. Conflicts in Niger, for instance, led to the closure of 900 schools, which forced girls in many areas to walk long distances across dangerous terrain to attend school, increasing their exposure to violence. In Chad, the presence of Boko Haram in some areas heightened the risks for girls and discouraged their attendance. In response to these challenges, in partnership with UNICEF and UNFPA, WFP implemented the Breaking Barriers for Girls' Education project in vulnerable areas of Chad and Niger from 2019 to 2022. This initiative, funded by Global Affairs Canada, used a multisectoral approach to address key barriers to girls' education, combining school meals, cash incentives, and health and hygiene support. WFP, a lead partner in the initiative, played a central role in improving educational outcomes for girls through targeted school meal programmes. Project evaluations in both countries reinforced the important role of school meals in improving girls' access to education, particularly in fragile settings. Both evaluations showed that school meals and cash incentives were effective in increasing enrolment and attendance rates.

In Niger, the percentage of girls taking final primary school exams rose from 20 percent to 36 percent, largely driven by school meals and cash incentives, which reduced the economic burdens on families and encouraged parents to prioritize education. In Chad, the evaluation found evidence of increased educational aspirations among students and families alike. The collaboration between WFP and its partners helped keep girls in school while providing them with safe and supportive spaces, demonstrating the value of the project's multisectoral approach. Expanding these interventions to reach more out-of-school girls, especially in areas where insecurity limits access to education, will be critical to grow and sustain the progress achieved.

Box 4.5

Empowering girls and boys through school meal programmes in Asia and the Pacific

WFP's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, in partnership with Development Pathways, conducted a two-year operational research study to learn how school-based programmes could be used as a platform to address the causes and consequences of inequalities between boys and girls. The study informed operational guidance on how WFP and its partners can work across various dimensions to help boys and girls access the same opportunities. Recommendations included building individual and collective agency and empowerment; challenging unequal power relations; and making formal and informal social norms and structures more equitable. The study identified the following good practices in the region:

- In Nepal, WFP and its partners worked with the government to develop educational materials and train teachers to address social norms around menstrual hygiene management with their students.
- In Sri Lanka, WFP collaborated with the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment to address unequal power relations and promote women's leadership and economic empowerment. WFP and the ministry trained Women Development Officers who, in turn, strengthened the financial literacy and economic independence of the school meal providers and women-led cooperatives involved in the home-grown school meal programme.
- In Cambodia, making formal and informal social norms and structures more equitable is an important objective for WFP and the government. WFP engaged with the Ministry of Women's Affairs to advocate for formalizing the contracts of cooks who prepare school meals and empowering women as programme suppliers.

The study also identified that social and behaviour change activities, which currently focus on health and nutrition, can be expanded to influence norms and attitudes about women and men in the wider community. The potential to advance women's economic and social empowerment through home-grown school meals emerged clearly in the study. Programmes can provide training to enhance women's skills and leadership capacities and provide access to income-generating opportunities and agricultural services, building the individual and collective agency of women producers and suppliers. Recognizing cooks and other actors engaged in the provision of meals as formal workers and providing them with proper wages is crucial to treat women and men fairly.

Achieving the full potential of gender-transformative approaches in school meal programmes demands coordinated, systematic and concerted efforts. By collating good practices and analysing enabling factors, lessons and challenges, WFP is contributing to the evidence base for advancing equality and women's empowerment through school meal programmes.



A student from Lao PDR enjoys her hot meal in school.
WFP/Vilakhone Sipaseuth

4.6 WFP's innovation in school meals

WFP has consistently integrated technology to enhance its school meal operations, aligning with the UN's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. WFP's School Feeding Strategy 2020–2030 and the new 2024 School Meals Policy emphasize data and digital innovation as key components of effective programmes. Since 2019, WFP has developed two innovative tools: School Connect and School Menu Planner PLUS, to improve efficiency, effectiveness and cost management in school meal programmes.

School Connect

Launched in 2020, School Connect digitizes school registries and extracts key performance indicators for school meal programmes – replacing paper-based data collection, review and recording, which can be cumbersome and error-prone. This application allows schools to efficiently manage stocks, attendance, enrolment and consumption information digitally. It supports various meal modalities, including on-site meals, school purchases, cash-to-schools and take-home rations, and incorporates home-grown school meal components. Access to these indicators in near real time enables programme staff to invest more time in providing quality support to schools, while ensuring that school meal programmes can adapt based on the most up-to-date and accurate data possible. School Connect aids programmes at different stages of transition to national ownership in 20 countries across the African continent, as well as Haiti, Honduras, Lebanon and Ukraine.

West and Central Africa is leading the adoption of this innovation: School Connect provides real-time data for regional programmatic oversight in 54 percent of schools where WFP works. In Benin, the tool tracks meals for 1.2 million children within the National Integrated School Meal Programme and has been used by the government as a blueprint for the design of its national monitoring system. In Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camp, machine learning analysis of School Connect data informs school meal programme design by identifying factors driving attendance and dropouts. In Haiti, the tool reduces response times and provides near real-time data on food movements for over 200,000 children covered by the home-grown school meal programme.

School Menu Planner (SMP) PLUS

SMP PLUS enables school meal operators to efficiently develop nutritious, affordable and community-sensitive school meal programmes. This AI-powered, web-based application optimizes school meal menus, ensuring they are cost-effective, use locally available foods and are nutritionally balanced. It also enhances economic opportunities for smallholder farmers and supports government efforts worldwide.

To date, 46 countries have been trained to use SMP PLUS, with 29 actively using the application to create menus. Over 4 million children benefit from meals designed through the platform. Benefits of SMP PLUS include enhancing diet diversity, advocating for increased school meal budgets, designing cookbooks and improving coordination among sectors involved in school meal programmes. For example, in Madagascar, a new menu using local foods now covers 40 percent of children's macro nutrient needs and 30 percent of their micro-nutrient needs. In Lesotho, the tool calculated prices for food baskets and menu options, which helped stakeholders advocate for an increased budget. Eventually, the government increased funding for the National School Feeding Programme by 65 percent.

In Zambia, SMP PLUS has been instrumental in operationalizing the Home-Grown School Feeding Procurement Strategy and the Diet Diversification Plan by creating district-level menus that meet children's nutritional needs using costed, local ingredients.

4.7 Way forward

Looking ahead, WFP is poised to deepen its role in advancing nationally owned, sustainable school meal programmes as a key driver of development in the twenty-first century. With school meals recognized as a powerful tool for tackling poverty, enhancing education and transforming food systems, WFP will focus on supporting governments through strengthened partnerships, targeted technical assistance and global policy leadership. The expansion of the School Meals Coalition reflects growing political momentum and commitment to scaling up school meal programmes. WFP will leverage this momentum – working with governments, international agencies, civil society and the private sector – to support countries in designing resilient, inclusive and context-specific school meal programmes that are rooted in collaboration and shared responsibility.

As outlined in its 2024 School Meals Policy, WFP will prioritize three strategic shifts to guide its future efforts.

- First, it will reinforce its role as a convener and advocate, facilitating stronger multisector partnerships across education, health, agriculture and social protection to align school meal programmes with broader development goals.

- Second, WFP will deepen its collaboration with governments and partners to build and finance robust national systems, grounded in evidence and tailored to local priorities.

- Third, it will work to enhance programme quality, ensuring school meals are integrated with nutrition, climate action and food system transformation. Partnerships will be central to each of these shifts, bringing together actors at every level to share expertise, align resources and scale solutions.

WFP's way forward also involves scaling its operational agility in fragile and humanitarian contexts while embedding long-term resilience through policy engagement and capacity strengthening. WFP will continue to work with partners to support national efforts to make school meal programmes more socially inclusive and adaptable to shocks, ensuring they serve as effective safety nets during crises. By fostering a dynamic ecosystem of collaboration across governments, donors, UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector, WFP aims to drive lasting impact. This approach will help institutionalize school meals as a core element of human capital development, unlocking opportunities for millions of children and contributing to more equitable and sustainable national growth.



Farmers harvest potatoes for school meals in Venezuela.
WFP/Gustavo Vera

Case study 11

Cambodia's journey towards sustainable, locally driven school meals by 2028

Cambodia's national school meal programme supports 190,000 children in high-poverty areas, enhancing nutrition, attendance and local food systems, while contributing to education and community development. The programme already includes home-grown commodities, fostering demand for locally produced, nutritious foods, diversifying children's diets and supporting local economies and agriculture.

In 2022, the Royal Government of Cambodia reaffirmed its commitment to expand school meals coverage by joining the School Meals Coalition and initiating a Joint Transition Strategy with WFP to achieve full national ownership of the school meal programme by 2028. To guide this transition, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports conducted a Systems Approach for Better Education Results–School Feeding (SABER-SF) exercise in 2023. This informed the development of a long-term capacity-strengthening action plan for programme handover and sustainability.

To ensure accountability and programme quality, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports developed and rolled out a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework across all ten targeted provinces where school meals are delivered. Officials from 34 district education offices monitor and support programme delivery.

Evidence-based approaches guide programme growth

The Royal Government of Cambodia partnered with WFP, Harvard University and the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition to conduct a value-for-money study, estimating the monetary value of the programme's impact on education, health and nutrition, agriculture, the local economy and social protection. Findings from the study are expected in 2025. The School Meals Coalition's Sustainable Financing Initiative is simultaneously conducting a detailed cost analysis to guide decisions on potential programme expansion and long-term policies.

As part of a joint FAO–WFP project on nutritionally optimal school meals, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports piloted guidelines for nutritional standards for school meals that also support local farmers (read more in Chapter 3).

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports evaluated how a pilot intervention to promote opportunities for female producers and suppliers through school meal procurement impacted local communities. Implemented across six schools and involving 25 female farmers, the pilot showed that increasing women's participation in the supply chain boosted profits, improved production efficiency and expanded leadership opportunities, contributing to stronger community resilience.

Legislation, Prakas No. 507 introduced higher cash rations per meal; guidelines for cooks and kitchen construction; and improved budgeting. Reflecting this strengthened commitment, the government increased funding for the school meal programme from US$5.6 million in 2024 to US$7.4 million in 2025.

Cambodia collaborated with the Philippines to host the first regional School Meals Coalition meeting in Asia in November 2024. The meeting created a platform for Southeast Asian governments to share achievements and best practices, learn from each other and set new goals. During this landmark event, the Royal Government of Cambodia presented its School Feeding Policy 2024–2035. The policy clarifies the objectives and vision of the national school meal programme; assigns institutional responsibilities; and outlines key initiatives, such as developing a legal framework, improving targeting mechanisms, raising community awareness, enhancing health and nutrition, and fostering agricultural and economic development. While the policy sets a clear direction for the school meal programme, detailed implementation mechanisms and action plans are still under development.

In 2024, newly established School Feeding Steering Committees at both national and subnational levels were formed, comprising representatives from relevant ministries and ensuring a multisectoral approach to implementation of the school meal programme. The committees' primary role is to oversee and coordinate implementation of the programme to ensure alignment with national standards. At the national level, the School Feeding Steering Committee plays a critical leadership role in translating the School Feeding Policy into actionable steps. This includes leading development of the Policy Action Plan, which will serve as a road map for operationalizing the policy, detailing clear roles, responsibilities, timelines and resource requirements to support its successful implementation nationwide.

Building on the momentum created by the regional event, Cambodia is also championing efforts to integrate school meal initiatives into the ASEAN framework.

Case study 12

Armenia takes full ownership of school meals: A model of national commitment and sustainable development

In July 2023, Armenia achieved a significant milestone by taking full ownership, management and funding of its national school meal programme from WFP. This transition, which began in 2016, was part of a comprehensive plan to enhance human capital development and ensure the well-being of students. Since 2001, WFP has supported the government to manage and fund the school meal programme, which provided hot meals to schoolchildren in ten provinces, excluding Yerevan, to improve children's nutritional status and learning capacities.

With WFP's support, school meal facilities in 1,050 schools were renovated and equipped; school agriculture projects were established in 60 schools; and school meal programmes shifted from delivering in-kind assistance to schools to a cash-based model where schools purchased food locally. A national School Feeding and Child Welfare Agency was also established to facilitate programme implementation. By January 2023, the government began funding the programme in all ten regions for children in grades 1–4 and, by July 2023, it fully managed and financed the programme.

The government now plans to expand the programme to schools in the previously excluded Yerevan province, potentially benefiting more children. Although WFP no longer manages the programme, it continues to provide technical support, promoting practices such as the circular economy, green energy adoption and school orchards.

The transition is testament to the successful collaboration between WFP, the Armenian government and other partners, including the Russian Federation. This partnership ensured the programme's sustainability and enhanced its impact on education and student well-being. Following the transition, the government recognized kitchen helpers and gardeners as school staff, providing them with salaries. This affected around 3,000 individuals, most of whom are women.

In 2024, the government provided hot meals to over 106,000 primary schoolchildren in ten provinces for all 180 school days. This represents significant coverage of 68 percent for primary school-aged children enrolled in schools for all children in the country, excluding Yerevan. Approximately 86 percent of schools had renovated kitchens and eating areas; over 4,000 school staff received training on managing school meals; and 2,500 rural women were employed by the programme.

The government has established a model where funds generated by solar stations and sales from school agricultural projects are reinvested in school meals. Solar stations generate approximately 3,437,950 kWh of electricity annually, amounting to US$387,000 each year. The programme also helped communities respond to shocks, accommodating children forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh. The government is also working on integrating wholegrain products into school meal menus.

In 2021, the government joined the School Meals Coalition, pledging to make school meals universally available by 2030, expand coverage to Yerevan, sustain budget allocations and integrate school meals into national education legislation.

Figure 4.8
Progression of school meal programme coverage in Armenia

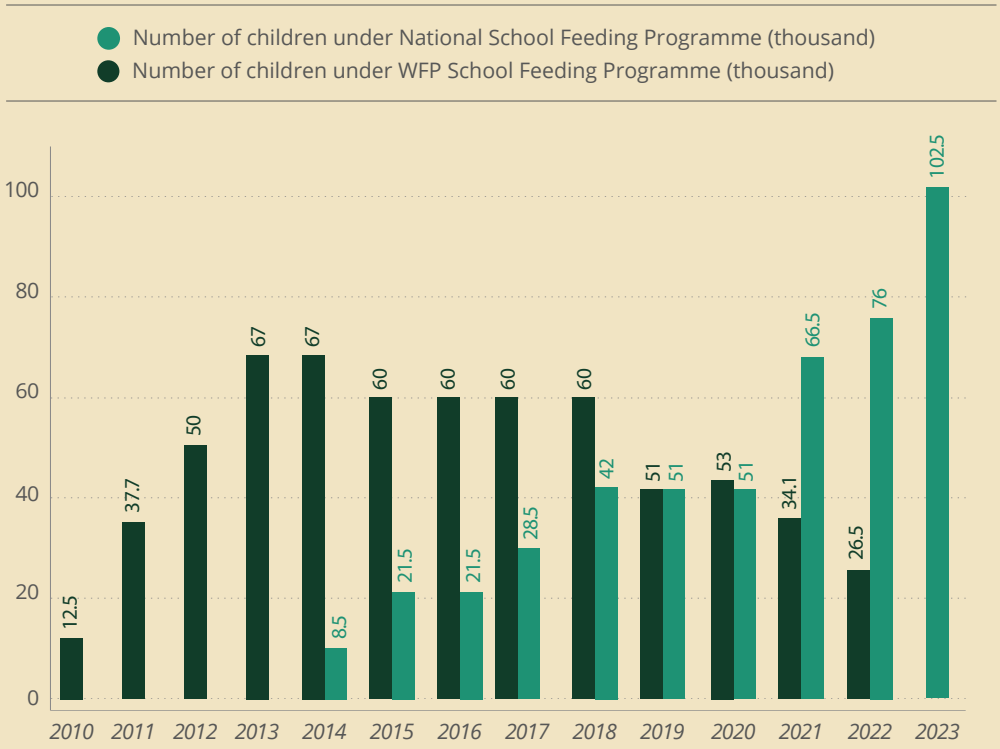
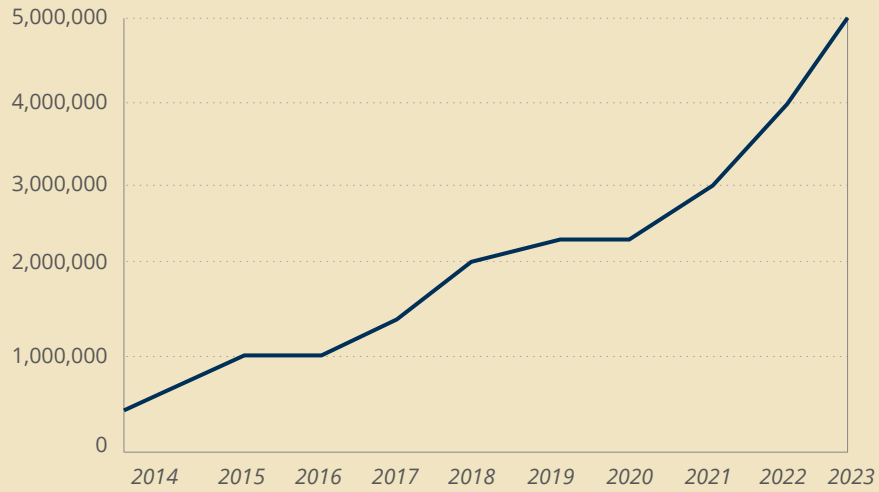


Figure 4.9
Government allocated budget for school year (180 meal days) in US$



Case study 13

The power of school meals in Haiti's transformation

In a country facing violence from armed groups, where 50 percent of the population urgently needs food assistance, a daily meal at school is a simple and effective way to ensure that children receive at least one nutritious meal each day. In Haiti, school meals are a strategic pillar of human development. The Haitian government, through the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training, places its school meal programme at the heart of its educational and social policy.

Under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training, the National School Feeding Programme plays a central role in planning, coordinating and implementing school meals throughout the country. The National School Feeding Programme's aim is to ensure that all Haitian schoolchildren have sustainable access to healthy, balanced food that meets their nutritional needs, thereby supporting their learning and well-being.

The programme's strategic objective is to eliminate hunger in schools by providing a daily meal, locally prepared according to strict nutritional standards, while supporting the resilience of national food systems. The general goals of the programme are to:

- provide a quality and sustainable food service;
- support the local economy and national food production;
- strengthen good governance mechanisms at all levels; and
- encourage participatory management and community ownership.

Partners – such as, but are far from limited to the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, WFP and various NGOs – play a role in supporting the National School Feeding Programme in different ways, from planning and financing through to implementation. WFP and the National School Feeding Programme worked together to update the National School Feeding Policy and Strategy 2024–2030. The strategy aims to consolidate local supply systems; strengthen programme management capacities; improve governance in the sector; and gradually shift from the previous model – which still relies heavily on imports – to one based on local school canteens.

The programme has made significant progress in recent years, with an increase in the share of locally sourced purchases. By the end of the 2023–2024 school year, 54 percent of the 477,678 children benefiting from school meals were enrolled in the local canteen programme, compared to 28 percent two years earlier. During the 2023–2024 school year, over 4,750 tons of food, worth more than US$9 million, were produced locally and distributed to schools. For the 2024–2025 school year, the goal is to reach 70 percent of students served through local sourcing, with a national ambition of 100 percent coverage by 2030.

To achieve this, in close collaboration with the National School Feeding Programme, WFP is working with 170 local farming organizations comprising approximately 20,000 members to structure short supply chains. These producers receive technical and logistical support, including establishment of processing units, provision of agricultural equipment and training on post-harvest practices, storage and quality control.

Early observations reveal that schools integrated into the local canteen programme demonstrate greater resilience, with fewer supply disruptions compared to schools under the traditional model. This suggests increased robustness of the local system in the face of economic and security shocks.

Partners are also supporting and leveraging school meals as part of a multi-impact approach, including towards the broader goal of food system transformation. For example, through the World Bank project, PROMESSE, students receiving school meals also benefited from vitamin A supplementation and deworming, while parents were sensitized on topics related to nutrition and hygiene, and community cooks received additional training. WFP is implementing complementary activities to promote literacy and health, while using the school meal programme as a lever to improve gender norms and promote equality. WFP is also seeking to reduce the programme's environmental footprint, notably by providing improved cookstoves for meal preparation, thereby reducing indoor air pollution, and training school cooks in their use.

The Haitian approach to school meals, led by the National School Feeding Programme, represents an innovative model for transforming local food systems, while strengthening education, social cohesion and national resilience.

Case study 14

Iraq's journey to national school meals ownership

The Government of Iraq is demonstrating strong leadership and commitment to school meals as a cornerstone of its education and social protection agenda. In the 2023–2024 school year, the government provided daily school meals (five meals a week) to 775,686 school-aged children, representing nearly 13 percent of primary school students. These meals reached children in 15 governorates and across 25 of the country's poorest districts with the objective of supporting children's retention, attendance and learning in schools. A government-led analysis of implementation in the 2023–2024 school year showed that the programme provided 1,817 job opportunities in the areas covered by the programme.

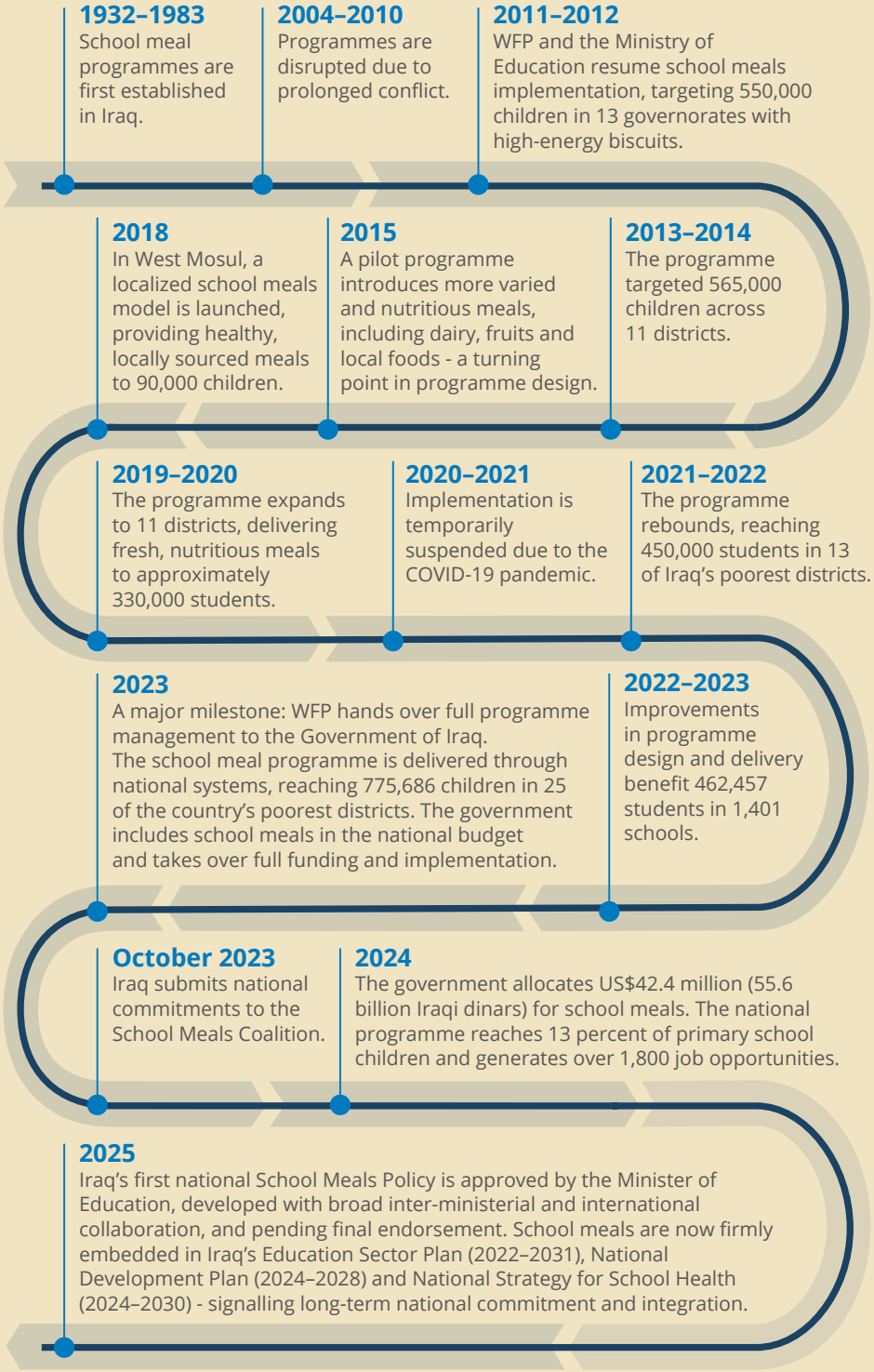
Since 2023, the government has fully implemented and funded the programme through a dedicated allocation in the national budget approved by the Iraqi Parliament for 2023–2025. In 2024, the government allocated 55.6 billion Iraqi dinars for school meals, with approximately US$36.7 million (49 billion Iraqi dinars equivalent) earmarked for 2025.

Institutional commitments are also reflected in national strategies. School meals are integrated into the Education Sector Plan (2022–2031), the National Development Plan (2024–2028) and the National Strategy for School Health (2024–2030). In 2025, the Iraqi Minister of Education approved Iraq's first-ever national school meals policy, developed in consultation with multiple ministries including planning, finance, health, social protection and agriculture; international organizations; and with technical and financial support from the European Union and WFP. The policy is currently pending endorsement by the Ministerial Council for Human Development.

Iraq's school meal programme has shown remarkable resilience through conflict, recovery and growth. Revived in 2011 by the Ministry of Education and WFP after a pause due to conflict, the programme steadily expanded from distributing high-energy biscuits to providing diverse, nutritious meals to hundreds of thousands of children. Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a temporary suspension of school meals in 2020, the programme quickly rebounded with the Ministry of Education and WFP continuing the distribution of school meals from 2020 to 2022 with reductions in school feeding days, reaching over 770,000 students across 25 districts by 2023/2024 – when it was fully handed over to the Government of Iraq. In October 2023, the government reaffirmed its commitment by joining the School Meals Coalition and pledging to institutionalize its school meal programme through national policy, legislation and systems, with plans to reach 1.4 million children initially and subsequently the entire 6 million primary school-aged children.

Iraq's strategy includes establishing an inter-ministerial coordination committee; introducing nutrition and food safety guidelines; and creating a robust monitoring system, firmly positioning school meals as a pillar of national development and social protection.

Figure 4.10
History of school meals in Iraq



Case study 15

Transition to national management of the school meal programme in Benin

The Government of Benin was one of the first to join the School Meals Coalition in 2021. The President of Benin, Patrice Talon, serves as a champion of the Coalition, given his leadership in prioritizing school meals in Benin and how the programme has become an example to emulate in West Africa and beyond. After his election in 2016, President Talon, recognizing the transformative power of school meal programmes for the children of Benin, established and rapidly expanded the National Integrated School Feeding Programme (Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré-PNASI).

The programme, whose annual budget exceeds US$50 million, has been mainly funded by the Government of Benin since its inception in 2017, with WFP supporting implementation on the government's behalf. Over the years, programme coverage has expanded from 31 percent of all public primary schools in 2017 to 75 percent in 2023, reaching approximately 1.4 million schoolchildren across 5,709 public primary schools. The programme has improved school enrolment and retention rates, enhanced students' nutritional status and supported the local economy through the procurement of local produce. This effort resulted in an increase in the portion of local products purchased for the programme from 24 percent in 2021 to more than 82 percent in 2024 when WFP transferred the programme to the government.

September 2024 marked a new milestone in the evolution of the National Integrated School Feeding Programme, as management of the programme was transferred to the National Agency for Food and Nutrition (Agence Nationale de l'Alimentation et de la Nutrition - ANAN), which was established for this purpose in July 2023. The transition was part of a lengthy preparatory process initiated from the start of the partnership with WFP in 2017 to ensure the right systems and capacities were in place.

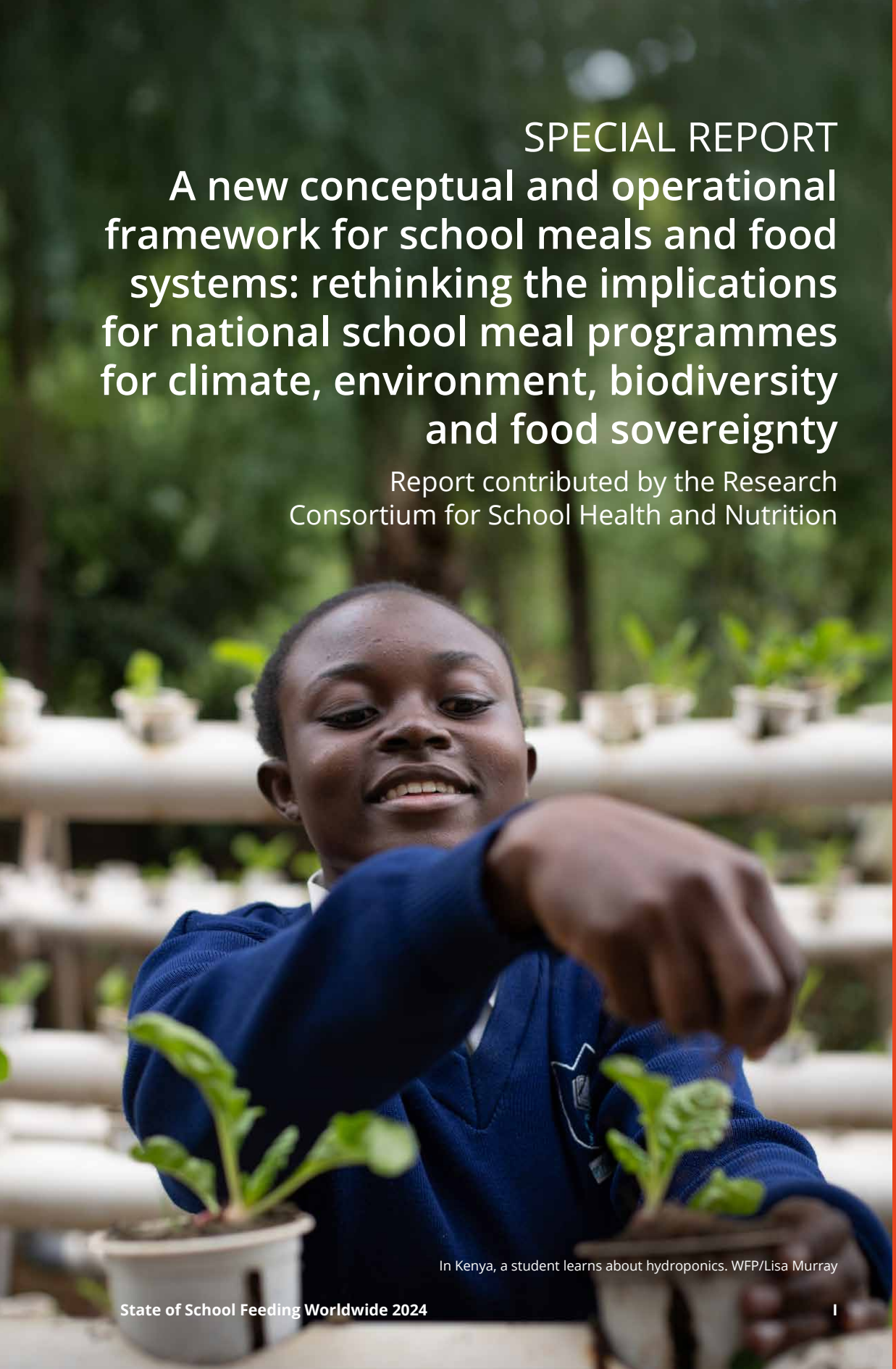
The government has also submitted commitments to the School Meals Coalition to reach 100 percent school meals coverage by 2026, while also improving the effectiveness and quality of the programme.

As this is the first school year that delivery of the national programme has been mainly implemented by the National Agency for Food and Nutrition, WFP is supporting the process to ensure food is purchased and delivered as planned, documenting good practices during the transfer process and to learn further lessons for South-South cooperation. The continued collaboration of WFP and the Government of Benin will shift in focus towards experimentation for learning to enhance the quality of the programme; innovate and promote relevant complementary activities; and strengthen links with local agriculture and job creation.

SPECIAL REPORT

A new conceptual and operational framework for school meals and food systems: rethinking the implications for national school meal programmes for climate, environment, biodiversity and food sovereignty

Report contributed by the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition



In Kenya, a student learns about hydroponics. WFP/Lisa Murray

This special chapter presents a new conceptual framework for the relationship between school meals and the food systems that supply them. The framework shows how the public procurement of food to supply national school meal programmes has the potential to significantly contribute to global efforts to address some of the world's greatest environmental challenges. This chapter is the result of two years of analysis and represents the joint work of 164 authors from 85 different organizations worldwide, indicating the topic's extraordinary importance and range of influence.

Rethinking food systems has never been more urgent. The world is facing a global nutrition crisis, with malnutrition affecting half of the world's population (FAO, 2021). The need to feed an increasing population, coupled with unsustainable food production and consumption, has caused depletion and pollution of natural resources, biodiversity loss, deforestation, ocean acidification and climate-related extremes (Searchinger et al., 2018; Willett et al., 2019). Food systems contribute to a third of all human-induced greenhouse gas emissions and 70 percent of freshwater use, while a third of all food is wasted along the value chain (Alexander et al., 2017; Crippa et al., 2021; UNEP, 2024).

Food production is the principal driver of biodiversity loss, mainly due to the conversion of natural ecosystems for crop production or pasture (Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, 2023). These environmental changes affect our ability to produce high-quality foods, further compromising food security and nutrition (Fanzo et al., 2021). This is especially damaging for countries in the global south that bear the brunt of the impacts of shocks and stressors more intensely than other parts of the world. These shocks will disproportionately affect children, with approximately 1 billion children at high risk of suffering from food insecurity (UNICEF, 2021), threatening their education, growth and development.

School meals are increasingly recognized as a key investment for governments to tackle these challenges and provide a platform for food system transformation. At the request of School Meals Coalition member states, the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition prepared a white paper, *School meals and food systems: rethinking the consequences for climate, environment, biodiversity and food sovereignty* (Pastorino et al., 2023), on how school meals can be made both nutritious and sustainable, and act as a leverage for food system transformation.

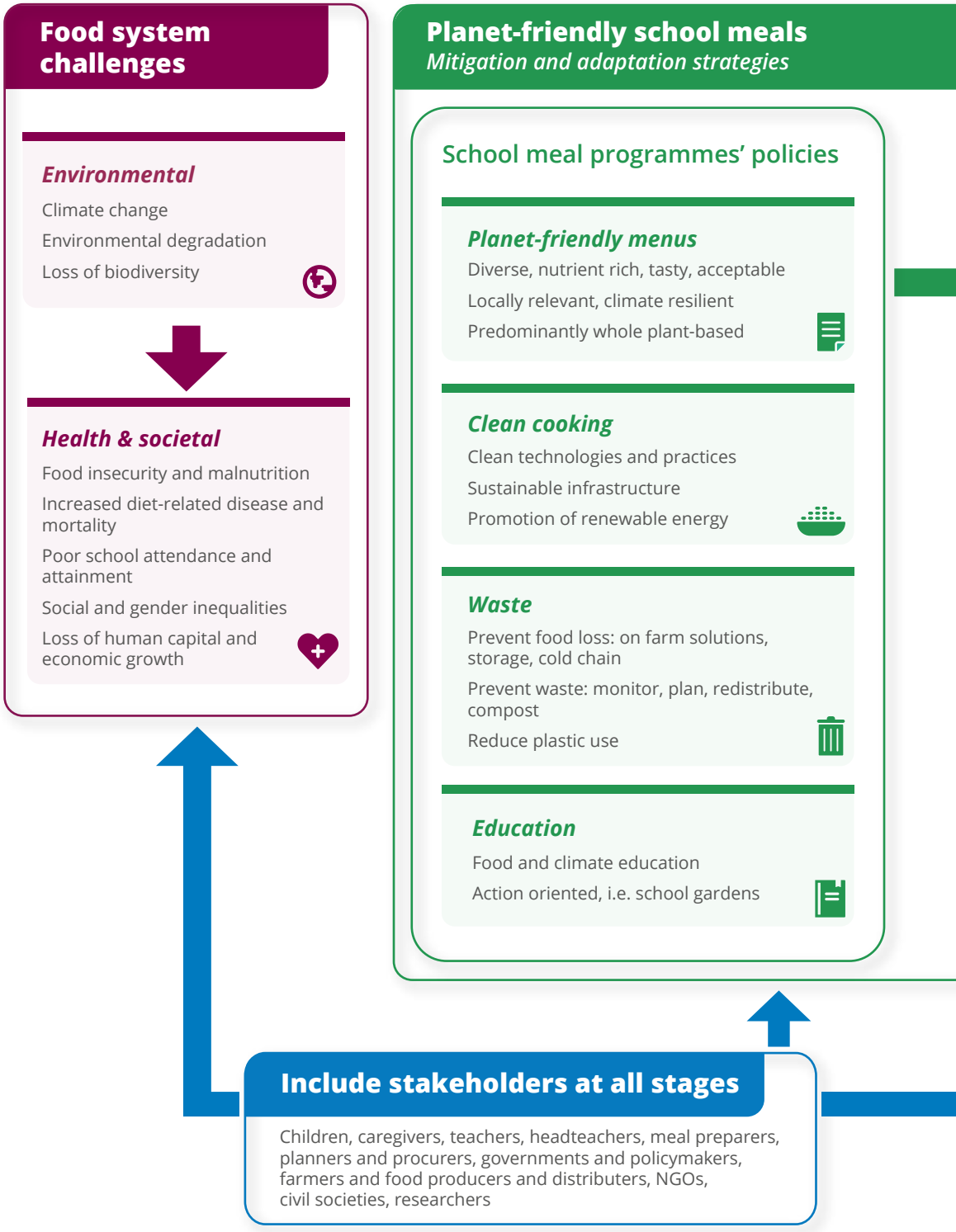
SR.1 A new framework for understanding the role of school meals in the context of food systems

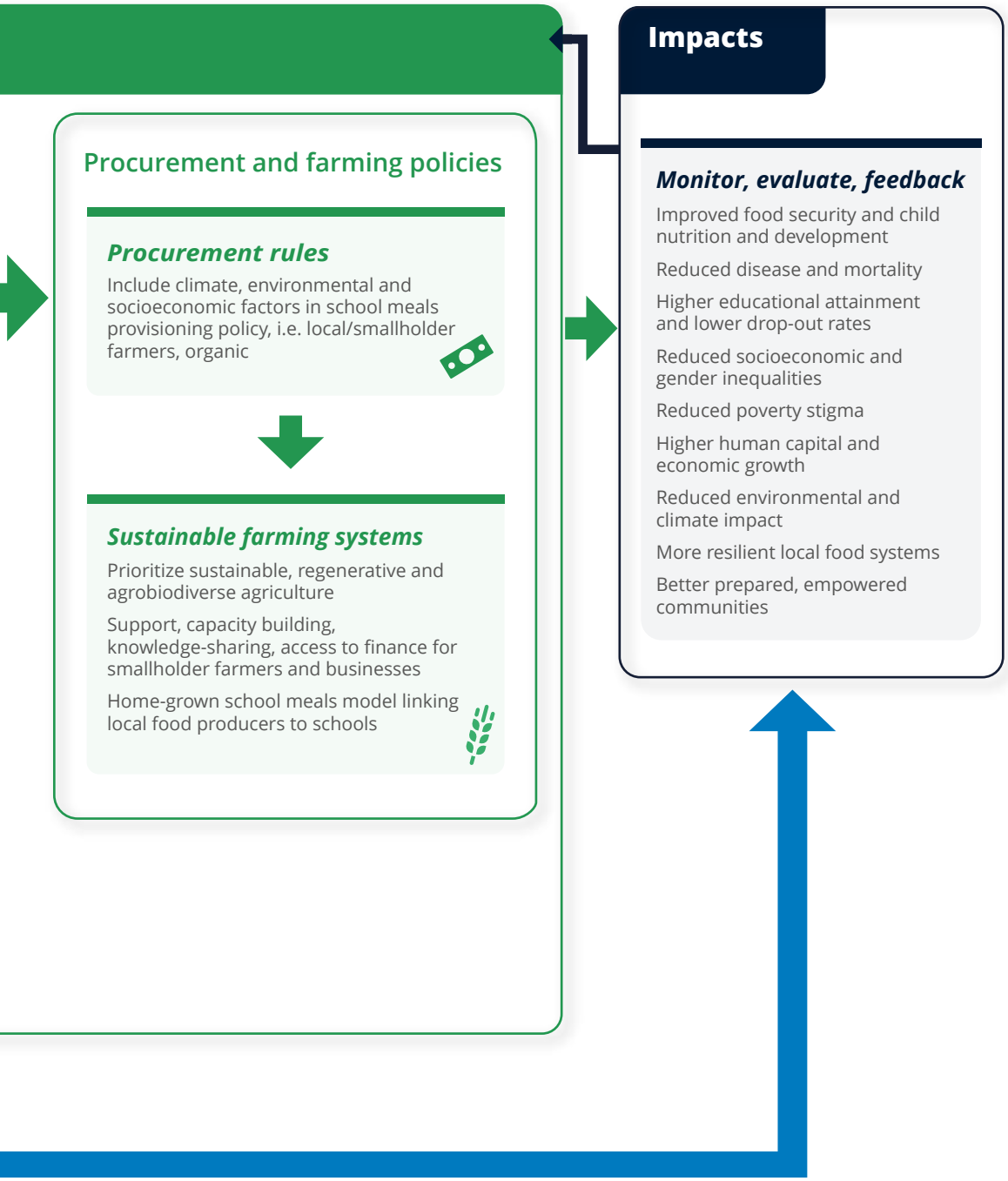
A key challenge for enhancing school meals is how to move towards healthier diets with lower environmental impact, while also enhancing the local and national economy, including farmer incomes. This challenge needs to be addressed by pursuing systemic innovations (Midgley and Lindhult, 2021). It entails changes in two sets of policies: (i) those directed at making immediate changes to school meal programmes in four key areas: menus, energy for cooking, waste and education about food; and (ii) demand-driven, planet-friendly procurement policies that promote agroecological farming practices and develop sustainable food systems (see Figure SR.1).



A girl in Uganda prepares herself for class after her school lunch. WFP/Daisy Masembe

Figure SR.1
Conceptual and operational framework for school meals and food systems





Source: Pastorino, S., Backlund, U., Bellanca, R., Hunter, D., Kaljonen, M., Singh, S., Vargas, M., & Bundy, D. (2024). Planet-friendly school meals: opportunities to improve children's health and leverage change in food systems. The Lancet Planetary Health. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(24)00302-4

SR.2 Planet-friendly school meals – demand-driven policies for healthy and sustainable consumption

Menu changes that promote environmental and population health

A planet-friendly diet means access to healthy foods for all, produced and consumed in ways that do not pollute or overexploit natural resources, such as land and water, and that protect biodiversity (Pastorino et al., 2023). To achieve this goal, populations should consume a variety of nutrient-rich fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, legumes and nuts alongside small portions of low-impact, animal-based foods (Willett et al., 2019). A nutritious, wholefood diet produced in resilient and sustainable systems presents major opportunities for adaptation and mitigation of climate-related consequences, while generating significant health co-benefits (IPCC, 2020). This requires strengthening the quality, type and diverse range of food included in school meal menus and simultaneously addressing inequalities within global food systems.

Adoption of traditional and indigenous foods in school meals increases agrobiodiversity, nutritional value and resilience to shocks

In contexts facing greater climate risks, planet-friendly school meals should aim to shift menus to include foods that are drought-resistant, or flood-tolerant (as local conditions require), which add nutrients to the soil and interact positively with local growing conditions. This is best accomplished by diversifying the types and sources of foods served at school; incorporating principles of agrobiodiversity; and acknowledging the importance of Indigenous Peoples and their traditional knowledge as custodians of biodiversity (FAO, 2022a; IPCC, 2019).

Incorporating traditional and indigenous diets into school meals provides an opportunity to improve child health, promote agrobiodiversity, foster a sense of connection to heritage and enhance the livelihoods of communities. Traditional and indigenous diets emphasize the use of locally sourced, seasonal ingredients, aligning with sustainable food practices. This entails the adoption of neglected and underutilized plant species and varieties, also known as “lost”, “native”, “orphan” and “indigenous” plants (IFPRI, 2023).

Many neglected food species and varieties are significantly more nutrient dense than the few dominant varieties consumed today, with higher levels of micronutrients (Akinola et al., 2020; Avallone et al., 2007; Hunter et al., 2019; IFPRI, 2023; Randrianatoandro et al., 2010). Endemic crops are also more resilient due to their natural adaptation to the local environment, i.e. they can withstand droughts and infertile soils and require little or no chemical input (IFPRI, 2023). Examples of countries incorporating neglected local species into their school meal menus include Brazil (Ministry of Health of Brazil, 2015) and India (Government of India, 2013).

A shift to more plant-based foods would bring the greatest health and environmental benefits in contexts where meat is overconsumed

Overconsumption of meat, especially ruminant meat, has the highest negative impact on environmental and human health (Godfray et al., 2018). Reducing red meat and eliminating processed meat intake would offer significant co-benefits for human health. It is important to substitute a reduction in animal-based foods with whole, unprocessed plant foods, such as fruit, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds and wholegrains, which are all currently under-consumed in most parts of the world. In particular, legumes such as beans and lentils offer an opportunity to shift the protein and vegetable component of diets towards healthier and sustainable plates: legume crops also improve soil fertility and have lower CO2 and nitrogen emissions (Stagnari et al., 2017).

Evidence from school settings shows that minimizing animal products in school menus can lead to a 22 percent reduction in global warming potential (Petruzzelli et al., 2023), without any compromise in nutritional quality. Low-carbon school menus, defined as more plant-based, have the potential not only to halve carbon emissions but also to positively impact land use, water use and energy demand (Batlle-Bayer et al., 2021). Modelling work estimates that providing meals in line with recommendations for healthy and sustainable dietary patterns could reduce environmental impacts on average by 26 percent (12–42 percent across the environmental indicators) for flexitarian meals; 43 percent (18–62 percent) for vegetarian meals; and 52 percent (23–81 percent) for vegan meals. The greatest reductions would be for land use, followed by greenhouse gas emissions, reducing the likelihood of creating polluting landfill (eutrophication potential) and demand on freshwater use.

These reductions would be larger in high-income countries. In many countries, including in Europe, active work is under way to increase the proportion of plant-based food used in school meal programmes, with many municipalities reducing meat in school menus.

Aquatic foods: an opportunity to incorporate small amounts of animal foods with high nutritional value and lower environmental impact

Aquatic foods are rich in essential fatty acids, micronutrients and protein and therefore can promote healthy nutrition in school (Bianchi et al., 2022; Hallström et al., 2019). Analyses of aquatic foods based on nutrient density and greenhouse gas emissions reveal certain species, such as small pelagic fish (for example, anchovies and sardines, which are often consumed whole) and molluscs, are particularly nutrient rich. They also have relatively lower greenhouse gas emissions compared to farmed species, such as catfish and prawns, which have high environmental impacts and can lead to ecosystem destruction (Bianchi et al., 2022; Hallström et al., 2019).

Through a successful pilot study, FAO has demonstrated the opportunity for integration of fish into school meals, leveraging public procurement strategies (FAO, 2022b). The collaborative experiences from countries such as Angola, Honduras and Peru underline the importance of multisectoral committees, uniting governmental and non-governmental entities to effectively integrate fish into school meal programmes. This collaborative approach generates affordable, locally accepted fish products while enhancing awareness of their nutritional benefits (Toppe et al., 2021).

Switching to clean cooking solutions for school meal preparation

Around the world, mostly in low-income countries, 2.3 billion people cannot access clean, efficient, convenient, safe, reliable and affordable cooking energy (UN, 2023) and mainly rely on traditional cooking systems, using high emission fuels such as firewood, charcoal and kerosene, burned inefficiently on open fires or simple stoves. This causes large environmental, economic, social, gender and health impacts (WFP, 2021). Traditional cooking systems contribute to the increase of greenhouse gases and cause more than 2 million deaths each year globally from illness and respiratory diseases, including lung cancer and pneumonia, with women and children being the most affected (WHO, 2022). Open cooking and charcoal or wood stoves are utilized in more than 85 percent of schools in low-income countries, while access to electric stoves in schools is minimal in low-income countries and less than 20 percent in lower-middle-income countries (GCNF, 2022b).

Evidence shows that modern energy cooking technologies, consisting of biogas, liquefied petroleum gas, electricity, ethanol, natural gas and direct solar cooking can reduce carbon emissions and contribute to achieving multiple SDGs (including SDG 3, SDG 5, SDG 7 and SDG 13) (Mazorra et al., 2020; Rosenthal et al., 2018).

Large electric pressure cookers have been found to be durable and safe and therefore appropriate in school settings (Batchelor, 2021). The findings of pilot projects in Lesotho and Kenya indicate that electric pressure cookers can improve the work environment and well-being for women, and address gender inequalities given that school staff members are predominantly female. Cooking with electric pressure cookers saves time; reduces the burden and health risks of traditional cooking systems; and requires less supervision, which enables staff members to conduct other productive activities, including teaching.

The introduction of electric cooking solutions and technologies for schools requires supporting enabling environments, reliability and the accessibility of the grid or off-grid electricity infrastructure, value chains and business models (Bisaga & Campbell, 2022). There is potential to attract more funding for school meal programmes by switching from traditional cooking fuels to modern energy cooking technologies and monetizing carbon emission savings, emphasizing the gender and health co-benefits of modern energy cooking technologies (WFP, 2021).

Economic, environmental and health impacts of switching to clean cooking in schools

Pilot studies conducted in Kenya, Rwanda and Lesotho, and evaluated by the Modern Energy Cooking Services organization have demonstrated that cooking with electricity, both grid and off-grid, can be cost competitive with current practice, saving 60–90 percent costs compared to cooking with firewood (Leary et al., 2023; Nsengiyaremye & Yesmeen Khalifa (MECS programme), 2023). Cooking with electricity, also called e-cooking, is faster, taking about half the time compared to traditional methods.

Transitions in the fuel and stoves used for cooking will lead to additional environmental benefits. However, the opportunities for, and impacts of, transition to modern energy cooking are highly context dependent. For example, transitioning from firewood to electric cooking will reduce burdens on forestry, but the significance of that change will depend on the ecological sensitivity of the forests exploited, and net greenhouse gas emissions will depend on whether the wood harvested is classified as non-renewable. This is another priority area for further work; for example, carbon finance could be useful in helping to overcome the first-cost barrier to the purchase of electric pressure cookers, but it relies on the traditional biomass coming from largely non-renewable sources.



A Nepalese farmer harvests vegetables to supply a nearby school. WFP/Samantha Reinders

Preventing food loss and waste

About a third of food is wasted: around 14 percent of the world's food (valued at US$400 billion per year) is lost after it is harvested and before it reaches retailers (FAO, 2019b). A further 19 percent is wasted in retail and by consumers, particularly households (UNEP, 2024). This lost and wasted food could feed 1.26 billion people every year. Food loss and waste also account for 8–10 percent of global greenhouse gases. SDG target 12.3 aims to "By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chain".

In low-income countries, food loss mostly occurs on-farm or post-harvest because of contamination by insect and foreign matter, bacteria, aflatoxin or other fungi and moulds. School meal programmes can implement multiple strategies to reduce food losses, such as improved pest control, harvesting, gleaning, salvaging, drying, storage, preservation, preparation, reuse and disposal methods. For example, drying technologies, such as the solar drying of fruit and vegetables, is an effective method to help prevent school food loss through the value chain (Bradford et al., 2020). Lack of sustainable cold chains, including freezers and refrigeration, directly results in 526 million tons of food production loss every year – approximately 13 percent of all food produced (IIR, 2021). Challenges become more acute in communities with limited access to electricity. Refrigeration capacity could allow schools to store perishable, highly nutritious food products such as fruits, vegetables, eggs and dairy for longer periods, supporting a more vitamin-rich, balanced diet.

In high-income settings, food waste occurs mainly at consumption level. For example, schools in the UK waste around 80,000 tons of food, most of which is avoidable waste (WRAP, 2011). A study in Italian schools estimated food waste to be 20–29 percent of prepared foods (García-Herrero et al., 2019). Food waste in schools is also associated with waste of resources, both natural and economic, and compromises the nutritional needs of schoolchildren.

Food waste quantification is an essential first step to identify existing waste issues and for evaluating interventions (Eriksson et al., 2019). In school kitchens, food waste can be divided into kitchen waste (storage, preparation and cooking); serving waste (food that is served but does not reach the plate); and plate waste (everything thrown away from diners' plates). To help reduce waste in schools and catering, the Swedish Food Agency has developed a

handbook with strategies to combat each type of waste (Swedish Food Agency, 2020). Menu planning, serving-size calculation, forecasting and use of leftovers are effective measures to reduce serving waste. Plate waste can be reduced by improving the dining environment, for example by allowing sufficient lunch time, and raising awareness of food waste with students (Malefors et al., 2022; Swedish Food Agency, 2020).

Food that cannot be recovered should be disposed of in sustainable ways. Food waste disposed of in landfill sites or incinerated generates methane and other emissions causing environmental pollution and potentially posing public health risks (HPA, 2011). The method of food waste disposal used has a significant impact on the overall impact of school meals. Waste emissions can be as much as one third of total emissions of a school meal if food disposal is 100 percent landfill. In schools using composting or anaerobic digestion, emissions from waste disposal are much smaller (Tregear et al., 2022). Additionally, plastic waste reduction, for example by using the prioritized framework Zero Waste Hierarchy (Zero Waste International Alliance, 2022) should be a priority.

Action oriented and holistic food education to help establish life-long, healthier and sustainable food consumption

To contain the negative environmental and disaster-related impact of human development, it is essential that children are prepared in schools by addressing environmental, social and economic issues in a holistic way, as emphasized by UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development programme. As part of this vision, the global Greening Education Partnership supports countries' education programmes in addressing disaster-related issues using a whole-system approach which involves all stakeholders.

Learning about the interconnectedness of food systems, health, well-being and the environment, and developing the capacity to act upon this learning, is a fundamental aspect of sustainable development (dos Santos et al., 2022; FAO, 2020). Institutionalizing this kind of education is not an easy task, as there are important challenges that can hinder its integration, including policy, training, time and system challenges. It is also important to identify the best entry points and assess the readiness of the system before designing a sustainable food and nutrition education initiative.



School meals in Malawi keep children healthy and ready to learn.
World Vision/Fyson Masina

FAO has developed a model to integrate effective food and nutrition education into school systems, which is informed by evidence and programmatic best practices from countries around the world. It defines an iterative, non-rigid process that should be co-created with students themselves (FAO, 2020). FAO advocates for school-based food and nutrition education (FAO, 2020): it is an action-oriented approach that foresees opportunities for direct experience and practices related to food consumption, nutrition, cooking and agriculture in real-life settings, such as school gardens, farmer visits to schools or vice versa, and food markets, etc. FAO also promotes a "whole-school approach" to food and nutrition education, actively involving all people that interact in the school setting, including children, their families, teachers, school staff, local farmers, foodservice staff, food vendors and government staff.

The EU-funded project SchoolFood4Change[41] built upon these practices by launching an action-oriented framework known as the Whole School Food Approach. This approach positions schools as pivotal change agents, with the aim of not only transforming the school food system but, through food education, fostering the health and well-being of children. School canteens serve as pivotal places where food and education can wield a cascading impact on planetary health diets.

An example of this action-oriented approach to fostering healthy and sustainable dietary habits among children is garden-based learning (Oro et al., 2018). School gardens offer various benefits, including a deeper comprehension of the agriculture and nutrition sectors; positive shifts in attitudes towards food; increased awareness of healthy eating; preservation of agrobiodiversity; and enhanced understanding of the impacts of long and short-term shocks on agriculture and food production (Hunter et al., 2020). For example, in the Philippines, school garden initiatives have promoted diversified garden systems; conserved cultivars of traditional and locally adapted vegetables; and enhanced dietary diversity and consumption of nutrient-dense fruit and vegetables (IIRR, 2023).

[41] More on the project can be found using this link: *https://schoolfood4change.eu/*

SR.3 The power of procurement: leveraging school meals as a tool to improve local agriculture, social and economic sustainable development and foster biodiversity

By requiring school meals to be planet friendly, governments can create demand for more sustainably produced foods and act as catalysts for food system transformation (Swensson et al., 2021). School food procurement has the power to promote farming practices that regenerate soil and ecosystem health, and promote biodiversity and resilience. When accompanied by supporting measures, local procurement from smallholder farmers can also contribute to boosting local agricultural development, strengthen local food systems, stimulate crop diversity and move people out of poverty.

Public food procurement is expressly recognized by the SDGs (Target 12.7) as a key instrument to promote more sustainable consumption and production patterns. As such, it is recognized by national and regional policies globally, including the European Farm to Fork and Green Deal strategies, the African Union Malabo Declaration and the Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan.

School food procurement can be used to achieve different (social/economic/environmental) goals according to government priorities. This makes it a unique policy instrument that can, and is being adapted to very different contexts and objectives, in both high, medium and low-income countries (FAO, 2021; FAO et al., 2021; Swensson et al., 2021). By creating a demand for planet-friendly food, governments have the power to set a positive trend; signal their ambitions for the future direction of food systems; and incentivize those involved in the supply chain to align their values accordingly, accelerating a transition towards more sustainable food consumption and production patterns (Foodlinks, 2013; Tartanac et al., 2021).

Procurement to drive regenerative agriculture

School food procurement can use its purchasing power to support and promote agricultural production that ensures environmental sustainability and agrobiodiversity. This includes, for instance, the purchase of food from organic, regenerative and agroecological production.

From an environmental perspective, evidence shows how the strategic use of public food procurement can contribute to mitigation of climate impact (Cerutti et al., 2018; SF4C, 2021), biodiversity conservation (Borelli et al., 2021), deforestation (Falvo & Muscaritoli, 2024) and the adoption of production practices with no use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, e.g. organic and agroecological practices (FAO, 2021; Lindström et al., 2020).

There is increasing recognition among governments of the importance of school food procurement to contribute to environmental outcomes globally, regardless of income level. One example is the African Union's Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022–2032) that identifies "enhancing the role and influence of public procurement in food purchasing to support diverse and nutritious diets for example home-grown school feeding" as a priority intervention and action area (African Union, 2022). In Europe, many municipalities have adopted sustainable school food procurement strategies – Nordic cities are leading the way, with high shares of organic and seasonal foods, and sustainably sourced aquatic foods procured for their school meal programmes (FAO, 2021). Strategies such as subdividing tenders; collaborating with regional organic networks; and implementing dynamic purchasing systems have been adopted to amplify the integration of locally sourced and organically produced food in schools.

Food system transformation through home-grown school meals

School meals can enable wider food system transformation through different pathways and processes by engaging with issues concerning food security, public health and conservation at various levels of governance, both formal and informal. The main pathways of transformation include small/family farms, women farmers and traders/food processors. The wider transformative outcomes catalysed by school meals include: (i) women's empowerment and social equity; (ii) adoption of regenerative and climate-smart food production; (iii) agrobiodiversity and natural resource management; and (iv) food sovereignty.

The key principles of school meals–food system engagement build on the now widely recognized concept of home-grown school meals, which is defined as school meal programmes designed to provide children in schools with safe, diverse and nutritious food sourced locally from smallholders (WFP et al., 2018). The main components of home-grown school meals include local food procurement, smallholder engagement, nutritious food, dietary diversity and regularity in meal provision.

WFP's support to home-grown school meal programmes has expanded significantly over the last decade: the number of initiatives where WFP supports the design and implementation of national home-grown school meal programmes had increased to 59 by 2023. Globally, WFP has increased its local purchases for school meals to 57 percent of total purchases, from 42 percent in 2022.

Home-grown school meal programmes are complex, multisectoral initiatives that can be designed and implemented in a large variety of ways depending on the local context. As well as local sourcing, home-grown school meal programmes supported by WFP typically include the following components:

- **Nutrition focus:** Meals are designed to meet the nutritional needs of students, emphasizing diet diversification and nutritionally rich meals, by the inclusion of fruits, vegetables, some animal products or fortified food for example.

- **Educational integration:** Many home-grown school meal programmes incorporate educational elements that teach students about nutrition, food systems and sustainable practices. This can include gardening programmes, nutrition education, cooking classes and training on the adoption of clean cooking technologies.

- **Community engagement:** Home-grown school meal programmes often engage parents, local organizations and governments to foster community support and involvement, creating a network that enhances programme sustainability.

- **Women's empowerment:** Recognizing the integral role that women play in the food value chain and in food production and preparation, home-grown school meal projects can promote gender equality and women's empowerment by creating employment opportunities and increased participation in decision making processes at different points along the value chain.

Public institutions' regular and predictable demand for smallholder farmers' products can facilitate investments by farmers to increase and diversify their agriculture production, contributing to agrobiodiversity and biodiversity gains, as well as to increased incomes (Drake et al., 2016; Kelly & Swensson, 2017; Singh, 2021; Valencia et al., 2019; WFP et al., 2018). Linking school food procurement to local and smallholder agriculture production can also contribute to strengthening local and regional food systems, and to the valourization of traditional, seasonal and resilient food systems.

In Cuba, farmers gain access to tools for farming. WFP/Irshad Khan





A girl runs through the shade house that supplies crops for school meals in Cambodia.
World Vision/Dara Chhim, Ben Adams, Elissa Webster

There is growing recognition that local and smallholder (or family) farmers could play an important role in the transition to just and sustainable food systems (Santacoloma & Zárate, 2021). Many Latin American and Caribbean countries have adopted public food procurement strategies encouraging the purchasing of food from family farms as powerful policy instruments to enable food system transformation. Examples of this approach are the public school meal programmes in Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay and Peru; the procurement system in Uruguay; and the Brazilian National School Feeding Programme (FAO, 2017, 2021; Soares et al., 2021; WFP & IDB, 2023).

In Brazil, at least 30 percent of the food purchased with federal funds through the national programme must be bought directly from family farmers, prioritizing purchases from settlers of the agrarian reform, quilombolas and indigenous communities. These programmes also give priority and provide a price premium for foods produced through organic or agroecological production practices.

From evidence to policy-led action

Planet-friendly approaches to school meal programmes must be supported by adequate and integrated policies, objectives and instruments for implementation (Swensson & Tartanac, 2020); include capacity building for those implementing the programmes (e.g. procurement officers) so they are fully aware and able to translate policy objectives into practice through the procurement process; and support to farmers and small–medium enterprises to allow them to upgrade and respond to the demands of new planet-friendly school meal programmes. This may include measures to support smallholder producers to increase, adapt and diversify their production based on environmentally friendly production practices; organize themselves collectively; and participate in public food procurement processes.

While the multiplicity of benefits that home-grown school meal programmes have the potential to achieve, and the number of beneficiaries they can reach is increasingly recognized by national and local governments, the lack of impact evaluations and longitudinal studies remains a gap. Preliminary studies undertaken by FAO showed that impacts on food security for smallholder farmers could even be negative if support is not provided to increase their productivity and maintain food diversity on farms (Giunti et al., 2022; Prifti & Grinspun, 2021). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that this situation is linked to the (multifaceted and complex) nature of these programmes and of food systems; and the consequent difficulties in examining a wide range of potential impacts simultaneously and capturing them in a quantitative and comparative way (Brunori & Galli, 2016).

In addition to addressing evidence gaps relating to impact, there is a need for focused, scientifically rigorous programmatic evidence to help understand the key drivers, constraints, risks and trade-offs of the different interactions between school meals and food systems. This will help develop appropriate, robust policy and operational mechanisms that can realize the potential of school meals in terms of changes to food systems and public health. While there is some emerging evidence in this area (through multi-disciplinary action research projects) there is a need for greater engagement across different countries and contexts. Such projects would help capture evidence on processes and transition, which is critical but often understudied.

SR.4 Two important policy issues in addressing food systems and public health

New guidelines on school food standards are a fundamental initial step in enabling policymakers, caterers and schools to serve healthy and sustainable school meals

There is an urgent need to incorporate environmental sustainability objectives in school food policies (dos Santos et al., 2022; Oostindjer et al., 2017). A pivotal juncture for incorporating environmental objectives is during the development or revision of school meals nutrition guidelines and standards and food-based dietary guidelines. A recent Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition report (I-CAN & GAIN, 2023) revealed that of the 70 food-based dietary guidelines reviewed, only 8 percent included a commitment to mobilizing resources and plans to take action to connect climate and nutrition. However, some pioneer countries, such as the Nordic countries (Blomhoff et al., 2023) have already embarked on this process. In planning such an endeavour, it is important to consider potential challenges, including lack of an enabling environment; lack of context-specific, good quality dietary intake data for schoolchildren, food composition and environmental footprint data of locally available foods; and limited capacity, infrastructure and logistics. FAO and WFP are currently devising a global methodology that countries can adapt to formulate nutrition guidelines and standards for their school meal programmes, incorporating environmental objectives (FAO & WFP, forthcoming).

Many policies that are environmentally sustainable are often more economically viable in the medium to long term

In some cases, changes can even reduce costs: for example, the move to more plant-based diets; the switch to more fuel-efficient cooking; portion size adaptation or waste reduction; and shorter supply chains.

Financial affordability may be of more immediate concern to policymakers, especially in resource-limited settings. Sources of support for planet-friendly school meals include debt swaps that specifically target human capital creation and climate financing resources. For example, climate finance could support farmers, micro, small–medium enterprises, entrepreneurs, innovators and start-ups to deliver climate-resilient foods for schools. However, thus far, only 1.7 percent of total climate finance targets small-scale agriculture, which represents a third of all food produced globally (Climate Policy Initiative, 2020).

Conclusions



In the Central African Republic, a girl prepares to eat her school meal.
WFP/Aurore Vinot

The previous edition of this publication (2022) provided an assessment of the state of school meal programmes as schools reopened after unprecedented closures following the COVID-19 pandemic, which had led to a learning crisis and the removal of a critical safety net. The global figures told a positive story of global coverage rebounding and exceeding pre-COVID levels. However, the speed of recovery was uneven and low-income countries were lagging significantly behind. Throughout 2021, governments increasingly recognized the need for a new approach to support schoolchildren and the significance of school meals as a programme contributing to multiple critical objectives. This led to the creation of the School Meals Coalition which, since its founding in 2021, has rapidly expanded in both membership and partner participation.

In concluding the previous edition, we tried to predict what might happen and what needed to be done. We highlighted five priority actions for school meal programmes: the top priority was to ensure that schools remained open and coverage of school meal programmes expanded. The other four actions focused on improving the quality of programmes.

Today, thankfully, we have moved past recovery and are experiencing a new global momentum which is driving the support for school meals. School meal programmes have expanded beyond all expectations with numerous countries only now starting a rapid scale-up of their programmes which gives us hope for the future. This edition marks a clear shift in the perception of school meals from a donor-driven priority to a nationally owned, powerful policy lever. We are now starting to see the true power of the reinvented multilateralism around school meals and its contribution towards changing hearts and minds around the world.

In the following section, we revisit the priority actions which were suggested in 2022 and explore the extent to which they were met. Looking to the future, we acknowledge that much remains to be done, and the future outlook is marred by risks and uncertainties.

We conclude by suggesting how the new landscape offers the chance to respond to today's priorities.

1. Sustain and expand coverage

The 2022 report identified that the number one priority for school meal programmes was to: *Ensure that schools remain open and ensure that coverage is sustained or expanded*.

From the latest surveys reported in Chapter 1 and since the previous edition of this publication, school meals coverage has expanded by around 48 million children, reaching a new historic milestone of 466 million children worldwide. This rapid expansion exceeded all expectations.

The highest change was recorded in low-income countries where needs are greatest, while countries with high levels of coverage focused on improvements to the quality of programmes.

Despite the positive momentum, low-income countries are still lagging behind in terms of coverage. The rapid shrinking of development aid risks destabilizing low-income countries the most, including in the continued expansion of school meal programmes.

The restated action point for 2025 is:
Ensure that schools meals coverage continues to expand and school meals improve in quality.

2. Reach those most in need

The 2022 suggested priority action was to: *Support the Sustainable Financing Initiative in helping low-income countries to identify novel and effective ways of funding programmes, and in helping all countries transition to self-reliance*.

The figures reported in Chapter 1 show that, in terms of coverage, low-income countries have made the biggest leap forward with an approximate 60 percent increase in school meals coverage over the last two years. It is also noteworthy that the international community was able to positively answer the previous report's call for action and increase the availability of external funding for school meals by approximately 20 percent to help low-income countries take the first steps before transitioning to self-reliance. Overall, investments in school meals have increased globally, while the proportion of national investments has largely remained the same, demonstrating the prioritization of school meals by governments, including in low-income settings.

The School Meals Coalition's Sustainable Financing Initiative answered the call for action and engaged in research on new approaches and innovation in funding school meals. At the country level, since providing finance strategy support to Rwanda in 2023, ten additional finance strategies are currently under way responding to significant demand from governments.

With donor funding shrinking, the transition to self-reliance in school meal programmes will become a greater and accelerated priority in the years to come. Countries need to explore not only innovative funding schemes, but also new and more cost-efficient models of delivering school meals. More consolidated efforts are needed from partners to support countries' national and subnational efforts and enable better knowledge exchange.

The restated action point for 2025 is:
Enhance existing networks and partnerships, and deploy expertise to support national and subnational efforts to find context-specific solutions to improve school meal programmes.

3. Enable learning

The 2022 suggested priority action was to: *Strengthen the availability of mission-critical data on school meal programmes through the following global goods: the Data and Monitoring Initiative, the State of School Feeding Worldwide reports and the "good examples" community of practice from the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition.*

The 2024 report highlights the extent of the acceleration of research and learning on school meal programmes. The Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition's Good Examples Community of Practice designed a standard template to conduct case studies of school meal programmes. Fifty-five country case studies are currently under way, and 21 studies have been published to date, spanning four continents. Based on this collection of case studies, several research tools were used to identify common good practices. In 2024, the Data and Monitoring Initiative launched the first version of the global School Meals Coalition database to respond to the need for a reliable, single source of global data on school meal programmes. The database will be maintained and enhanced through the expansion of functionalities and new indicators to fill critical data gaps.

This edition highlights the complexity of networks and exchanges initiated through the School Meals Coalition and how it has become a new global platform for learning and sharing best practices to improve school meal programmes worldwide. An important future objective will be the continued expansion of this powerful platform and the reinvention of the partnership to ensure that data and research can be translated into policies and operational actions.

The restated action point for 2025 is:
Expand membership of the School Meals Coalition as a means to accelerate government action, enable learning and enhance the availability of evidence to inform policy and programming.

4. Transform food systems

The 2022 suggested priority action was to: *Support the connection between school meals, food systems and climate change. Prioritize national government access to independent evidence on the costs, benefit and effectiveness of different home-grown school feeding programme designs, as well as on climate change and food sovereignty*.

School meals are increasingly recognized as a key investment for governments to tackle societal and environmental challenges, and in providing a platform for food system transformation. At the request of School Meals Coalition member states, the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition prepared a white paper in 2023, "School meals and food systems: rethinking the consequences for climate, environment, biodiversity and food sovereignty" (Pastorino et al., 2023), on how school meals can be made both nutritious and sustainable, and act as a catalyst for food system transformation.

This report presents a new conceptual and operational framework for the relationship between school meals and the food systems that supply them. The framework shows how the public procurement of food to supply national school meal programmes has the potential to significantly contribute to global efforts to address some of the world's greatest environmental challenges. This is the result of two years of analysis and represents the joint work of 164 authors from 85 different organizations worldwide, indicating the topic's extraordinary importance and range of influence.

This research and new framework are a direct response to governments around the world prioritizing home-grown school meals and seeing the potential for local economies and food system transformation. The future objective will be to answer practical questions and develop new school meal models, taking into account context-specific challenges and constraints.

The restated action point for 2025 is:
Unleash the power of school meal programmes as a key enabler for food system transformation and a strategy for investment in the economic prosperity and human capital of the next generation.

5. Strengthen the world's most extensive safety net

The 2022 suggested priority action was to: *Explore the role of school meal programmes as the world's most extensive safety net and ensure that they are part of the response to the food and climate crises*.

School meal programmes are recognized as the world's most extensive safety net and lessons continue to be learned on how school meals expanded their coverage and helped absorb shocks during the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The question now is how this safety net can be further adapted to be responsive to shocks and how countries can better prepare for future disruptions and crises. These lessons and preparedness efforts are needed at national and subnational levels, including through exchanges between cities and municipalities.

The restated action point for 2025 is:
Prepare for future crises and supply chain disruptions, while protecting the most vulnerable, through school meals as the world's most extensive safety net.

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Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency – New Partnership for Africa's Development
COP	Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GAMA	Global Action for the Measurement of Adolescent Health
GCNF	Global Child Nutrition Foundation
LAYS	Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMP PLUS	School Menu Planner Plus
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Glossary

AGROBIODIVERSITY	The variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms that are used directly or indirectly for food and agriculture, including crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries.
AGROECOLOGY	A holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment, while also addressing the need for socially equitable food systems within which people can exercise choice over what they eat and how and where it is produced.
CIRCULAR ECONOMY	Refers to one of the current sustainable economic models, in which products and materials are designed in such a way that they can be reused, remanufactured, recycled or recovered (4-R) and thus maintained in the economy for as long as possible, along with the resources from which they are made; and the generation of waste, especially hazardous waste, is avoided or minimized and greenhouse gas emissions are prevented or reduced.
CLEAN COOKING SOLUTIONS	Clean fuels, technologies and practices which attain the fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) and carbon monoxide (CO) levels recommended in *WHO global air quality guidelines (2021)*.
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE	A gathering of individuals motivated by the desire to cross organizational boundaries, to relate to one another and build a body of actionable knowledge through coordination and collaboration.
COSTS	The per-child cost of school meals is estimated as the total expenditure associated with school meals divided by the number of recipients. The figure reflects costs related to commodity procurement, transportation, storage and handling, and personnel. Community contributions are not included (Gelli & Daryanani, 2013).
COVERAGE	The proportion of children enrolled in school receiving school meals.
DEWORMING	A treatment to control intestinal worm infections such as helminths (roundworm, ringworm and hookworm) and schistosomiasis. WHO has recommended giving children albendazole or mebendazole to treat helminths and praziquantel to treat schistosomiasis.
DIETARY DIVERSITY	The consumption of a proper balance of different foods that provide all the macronutrients and micronutrients needed for healthy growth and a productive life.

FOOD-BASED SAFETY NETS	Category of interventions that provide direct, regular and predictable food assistance to the most vulnerable people to: (i) prevent them from falling below a minimum level of food security as a result of a shock; (ii) increase their resilience to shocks; and (3) in some cases, promote their food security (Grosh et al., 2008). The retail value of a food transfer in the local market is referred to as an income transfer.
FOOD SYSTEMS	Interlocking networks of relationships that encompass the functions and activities involved in producing, processing, marketing, consuming and disposing of food from agriculture, forestry or fisheries.
FORTIFICATION	The practice of deliberately increasing the content of essential micronutrients (such as Vitamin A, iron, iodine or zinc) in foods (WHO and FAO, 2006).
HOME-GROWN SCHOOL MEALS	A school meals model that is designed to provide children in schools with safe, diverse and nutritious food, sourced locally from smallholder farmers.
INVESTMENT	The total budget allocated to school meals by the government or WFP, or an estimation of that budget. In this publication, budgets are estimates based on secondary data and not on information from national balance sheets.
NATIONAL SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMME	A programme designed, implemented, funded and/or managed, in part or in full, by the government, sometimes with the support of partners, to provide food on a regular basis to schoolchildren.
NUTRITION-SENSITIVE PROGRAMME	Interventions addressing the basic and underlying determinants of malnutrition: food security, caregiving, access to health services, and a safe and hygienic environment. Nutrition-sensitive programmes also address the enabling environment through technical assistance to governments, including advising on policies in complementary sectors.
REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE	Holistic farming systems that, among other benefits, improve water and air quality, enhance ecosystem biodiversity, produce nutrient-dense food and store carbon to help mitigate the effects of climate change. These farm systems are designed to work in harmony with nature, while also maintaining and improving economic viability.
SAFETY NET	Policies and programmes that help individuals and families manage risk and volatility; protect them from poverty and inequality; and help them to access economic opportunity. Such programmes build on country-level delivery systems (for identification, payments and social registries) to ensure that safety net transfers reach the right beneficiaries at the right time.

SCHOOL HEALTH AND NUTRITION	Health and nutrition programming designed for school-aged children, as well as outreach activities that expand the effect of programmes within communities and to children not in schools. The services provided through School Health and Nutrition go beyond feeding, and may include additional interventions such as deworming, vaccination, vision screening, nutrition education and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).
SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMME	The provision of food to children or their households through school-based programmes. Such programmes can provide meals, snacks or conditional household transfers in the form of cash, vouchers or in-kind, take-home rations.
SMALLHOLDER FARMER	There is no unambiguous global definition of a smallholder farmer. Often, scale of operation measured in terms of farm size is used as a classification criterion. For example, smallholders are often viewed as those farming less than two hectares. But even this farm size is considered "large" in some countries or regions within countries. As a result, other parameters are sometimes used, including the volume of production; the source and amount of available labour; and the value of capital and inputs.
SOCIAL PROTECTION	A set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their lifetime, with particular emphasis on vulnerable groups.

Annex I
Recent publications by WFP and partners

1. WFP publications

Updated School Meals Policy

WFP's updated School Meals Policy highlights the transformative impact of nationally led programmes in improving child nutrition, education and sustainable development. Drawing on 60 years of experience and over 50 successful national transitions, the policy emphasizes stronger government partnerships, climate-smart design and advocacy for sustainable financing. It supports the goals of the School Meals Coalition, uniting over 100 countries and more than 140 partners to ensure every child receives a daily meal by 2030. Despite reaching 418 million children between 2020 and 2022 – 98 percent through domestic funding – significant gaps remain in low-income countries, calling for innovative financing and targeted capacity building.

WFP. 2024. School Meals Policy. Available at: *docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000163758/download/?_ga=2.239026376.936834598.1747126119-1807880131.1696253541*

State of School Feeding Worldwide

The *State of School Feeding Worldwide* is WFP's flagship biennial report, providing the most comprehensive global overview of school meal programmes. First published in 2013, in collaboration with the World Bank and Partnership for Child Development, it established WFP as a global leader in this field. Subsequent editions in 2020 and 2022 highlighted the evolution of school meal programmes, their integration with social protection and the impact of COVID-19. The 2022 edition showed strong recovery following the global pandemic, although low-income countries remained behind pre-pandemic levels. The 2024 edition – the fourth in the series – continues to build the evidence base for effective, equitable school meal delivery worldwide.

WFP. 2022. *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022. Rome, World Food Programme*. Available at: *https://www.wfp.org/publications/state-school-feeding-worldwide-2022*

WFP. 2020. *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020. Rome, World Food Programme*. Available at: *https://www.wfp.org/publications/state-school-feeding-worldwide-2020*

WFP. 2013. *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2013. Rome, World Food Programme*. Available at: *https://reliefweb.int/report/world/state-school-feeding-worldwide-2013*

A Chance for Every Schoolchild – WFP School Feeding Strategy 2020–2030

In 2020, WFP launched a ten-year strategy to advocate for increased investment in the health and nutrition of school-aged children and adolescents. The strategy emphasizes WFP's role in convening partners, advocating globally and supporting countries to address gaps in the provision of school meals. While WFP may not lead every intervention, it leverages its 60+ years of experience, presence in over 100 countries and deep knowledge of vulnerable populations to strengthen national programmes. By working collaboratively and drawing on its technical expertise, WFP aims to make school meal programmes a core component of national development and long-term human capital strategies.

WFP. 2020. *A Chance for Every Schoolchild – WFP School Feeding Strategy 2020-2030*. Available at: *https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000112101/download/*

School Feeding Situation Analysis – needs and challenges in WFP programming

This document is part of a broader situation analysis conducted by WFP's School-Based Programmes Service, with support from the WFP Centre of Excellence, in late 2018. It informs implementation of WFP's School Feeding Strategy 2020–2030 by identifying key areas for organizational action to strengthen the delivery of school meal programmes and technical assistance. The analysis focuses on six priority areas: strategic direction, programme quality, partnerships, workforce capacity, systems and evidence generation.

These elements are essential for supporting countries in building effective, sustainable school meal programmes that respond to national priorities and contribute to improved learning, nutrition and development outcomes.

WFP. 2018. *School Feeding Situation Analysis – Needs and Challenges in WFP Programming*. Available at: *https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000112503/download/*

School Feeding in 2018 – Beyond the Annual Performance Report 2018 Series

This thematic report, developed by WFP's Performance Management and Reporting Division and the School-Based Programmes Service, captures WFP's progress in school meal programmes and reflects on lessons learned to shape future strategy. It reviews achievements from 2018 to 2019 in supporting vulnerable children, families and communities through school-based interventions, drawing on country and annual performance reports. The report also presents previously unpublished insights from a 2018 stocktaking exercise, which included evaluations, audits and consultations across country, regional and global levels. These findings have directly informed the development of WFP's new global school feeding strategy, marking a pivotal step forward in programme direction.

WFP. 2019. *School Feeding in Ghana - Investment Case - Cost Benefit Analysis Report*. Available at: *https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000108072/download/*

WFP. 2019. *Costs-benefits Analysis of WFP Benin School Feeding Programme.* Available at: *https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000114270/download/*

WFP. 2019. *School Feeding in 2018 – Beyond the Annual Performance Report 2018 Series*. Available at: *https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000110344/download/*

2. Programme guidance and selected evaluations

WFP. 2020. *From the School Gate to Children's Plate: Golden Rules for Safer School Meals*. Available at: *https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000105252/download/*

The Food Safety and Quality Guidelines for Safer School Meals assign school meal programme managers responsible for the overall quality and safety of the food provided in schools, and those responsible for designing training for cooks and food handlers at school level with the basic food safety principles and good practices for the selection, storage, preparation and serving of food.

WFP, FAO, IFAD, NEPAD, GCNF & Partnership for Child Development. 2018. *Home-Grown School Feeding Resource Framework. Technical Document*. Available at: *https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000074274/download/*

This resource framework is a guidance tool for stakeholders involved in programme design, implementation and monitoring of home-grown school meal programmes and the related policy and institutional environment. Stakeholders may include governments and development partners providing technical and financial assistance, as well as civil society, community-based organizations and the private sector.

World Bank. 2016. *Manual for SABER School Feeding Exercise*. Available at: *https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/239141496301589942/pdf/Systems-Approach-for-Better-Education-Results-SABER-school-health-and-school-feeding.pdf*

This manual, published by WFP and the World Bank in 2016, helps stakeholders plan and implement a SABER school feeding assessment at country level.

WFP. 2022. *Joint Evaluation of the Breaking Barriers for Girls' Education Programme in Chad and Niger (2019-2022)*. Available at: *https://www.wfp.org/publications/joint-evaluation-breaking-barriers-girls-education-programme-chad-and-niger-2019-2022*

These decentralized evaluations were commissioned by the WFP School-Based Programmes Team to cover the Breaking Barriers for Girls' Education Programme in Chad and Niger (2019–2022). The evaluations were jointly carried out by UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP in 2023.

WFP. 2025. *Evaluation of Joint Resilience Programme in South-Central Somalia 2018-2022*. Available at: *https://www.wfp.org/publications/evaluation-joint-resilience-programme-south-central-somalia-2018-2022*

This evaluation pertains to the Joint Resilience Programme, implemented by UNICEF, WFP and local partners. The programme aimed to address vulnerabilities and foster resilience for over 3.8 million beneficiaries in Banadir, Gedo and Jubaland with EUR 90.6 million in funding across two phases. The evaluation was jointly commissioned by the WFP and UNICEF Country Offices.

WFP. 2024. *Jordan, School Meal Programme: Impact Evaluation.* Available at: *https://www.wfp.org/publications/jordan-school-meal-programme-impact-evaluation*

WFP, in partnership with the Government of Jordan and the World Bank, conducted a randomized controlled trial to evaluate how a new school meals delivery model impacted children's nutrition, behaviour, education and kitchen workers' socioeconomic outcomes.

WFP. 2024. *Summary of Evaluative Evidence: Home-Grown School Feeding*. Available at: *https://www.wfp.org/publications/summary-evaluation-evidence-home-grown-school-feeding*

This summary brings together evidence from 49 WFP-commissioned independent evaluations, which cover the period 2018–2023. The summary offers lessons on WFP's home-grown school meals programming to inform ongoing and future interventions. It has global coverage, covering WFP interventions in 45 countries.

WFP. 2023. *Lessons on School Feeding in West and Central Africa.* Available at: *https://www.wfp.org/publications/summary-evaluation-evidence-lessons-school-feeding-west-and-central-africa*

The summary highlights lessons from School Health and Nutrition and Home-Grown School Feeding, sharing good practices from West and Central Africa to inform global programmes.

3. Country case studies developed by WFP and external partners

BANGLADESH

WFP. 2018. *The Impact of School Feeding in Bangladesh*. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000105838/download/

WFP. 2019. *The School Feeding Programme in Bangladesh – A Case Study*. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000112387/download/

BENIN

Government of Benin, WFP and Mastercard. 2019. *Programme d'alimentation scolaire du Bénin - Analyse Coût-Bénéfice*. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000114270/download/

BHUTAN

WFP. 2018. *Home-grown School Feeding in Bhutan*. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000105579/download/

ETHIOPIA

WFP. 2019. *Home-grown School Feeding in Ethiopia*. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-00000106647/download/

GHANA

Dunaev, A. & Corona, F. 2018. *School Feeding in Ghana - Investment Case: Cost-Benefit Analysis Report*. Government of Ghana, WFP and Mastercard. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000108072/download/

WFP. 2018. *Home-grown School Feeding in Ghana.* Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000105577/download/

GUATEMALA

WFP. 2019. *Home-grown School Feeding in Guatemala.* Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000107060/download/

HAITI

WFP. 2019. *Home-grown School Feeding in Haiti.* Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000105582/download/

INDONESIA

Government of Indonesia, WFP & Mastercard. 2018. *National School Meals Programme in Indonesia – Cost-Benefit Analysis*. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000103420/download/

KENYA

WFP. 2016. *Using Local Cereals and Local Mills to Supply School Meals in Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camp*. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000117001/download/

WFP. 2018. *Home-grown School Feeding in Kenya.* Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000105578/download/

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

WFP. 2018. *How WFP Supported the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic to Optimize the National School Meals Programme: A Case Study on Nutrition-Sensitive Programming in a Lower-Middle-Income Country*. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000073347/download/

MADAGASCAR

Government of Madagascar, WFP & Mastercard. 2019. *L'analyse coût-bénéfice de l'alimentation scolaire à Madagascar.* Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000115670/download/

NIGER

WFP. 2017. *Results and Lessons Learned from WFP's Efforts to Support Adolescent Girls in Niger*. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000117053/download/

RWANDA

WFP. 2019. *Home-grown School Feeding in Rwanda.* Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000106253/download/

TUNISIA

WFP. 2018. *Home-grown School Feeding in Tunisia*. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000105580/download/

4. Selected partnership resources

Akter, F., Chowdhury, M. A. & Shamim, A. A. 2025. School Meals Case Study: Bangladesh. Working Paper. London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. *https://doi.org/10.17037/PUBS.04673392*

Alderman, H., Bundy, D. A. P. & Gelli, A. 2024. School Meals Are Evolving: Has the Evidence Kept Up? World Bank Research Observatory. *https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lkad012*

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Ethiopia Value for Money Study Team. 2024. Value for Money of School Feeding Programmes in Ethiopia. Working Paper. London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

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Annex II
Methodology and sources used for estimating children receiving school meals, coverage and investment

A2.1 Sources

Similar to the *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022*, this publication draws on a combination of primary and secondary sources. Each source was selected based on the following criteria:

1. Relevance: sources that contain standard indicators on school feeding.
2. Credibility: sources published by official and academic institutions.
3. Availability: sources in open and public access.
4. Timeliness: sources published recently.

Primary data for the 2024 edition were drawn from two main sources:

- Official sources, including official statistics from government reports and members of the School Meals Coalition.

- The USDA-sponsored GCNF *Global Survey of School Meal Programs* ©, published in 2024. The Global Survey of School Meal Programs © is the property of GCNF and is protected by copyright, all rights reserved. It may not be reproduced or distributed without prior written consent. Funding for the most recent survey in 2023 and previous surveys in 2021 and 2019 is provided, in part, by USDA under agreement number FX18TA-10960G002.

When data were not available from the sources above, data were drawn from sources employed in previous editions of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* 2020 and 2022. These secondary sources include reports, publications and case studies. As in 2022, when selecting secondary sources, the overarching principle was to use only sources published by official institutions: governments, international organizations and academic institutions (peer-reviewed academic papers).

The full list of secondary sources used for this publication are:

1. WFP's Annual Country Reports

2. WFP estimations from country offices and regional bureaux

3. The World Bank's State of Social Safety Nets 2018 (World Bank, 2018)

4. WFP's report on Smart School Meals in Latin America and the Caribbean (WFP, 2017)

Several countries appeared in more than one of these secondary sources. In this case, only one data point was used for each country based on the following criteria:

1. If more than one source cites data for the same country, primary data sources were used, prioritizing official sources based on the most recent reference year.

2. If more than one source of information is available for the same country and the same reference year, the most comprehensive source was used – for instance, one source may cover a particular programme while the other source covers all existing programmes in the same country.

As a result of this selection criteria, Table A2.1 illustrates the number of countries from each source used in this publication.

Figure A2.1

Breakdown of countries by data sources (n=176)

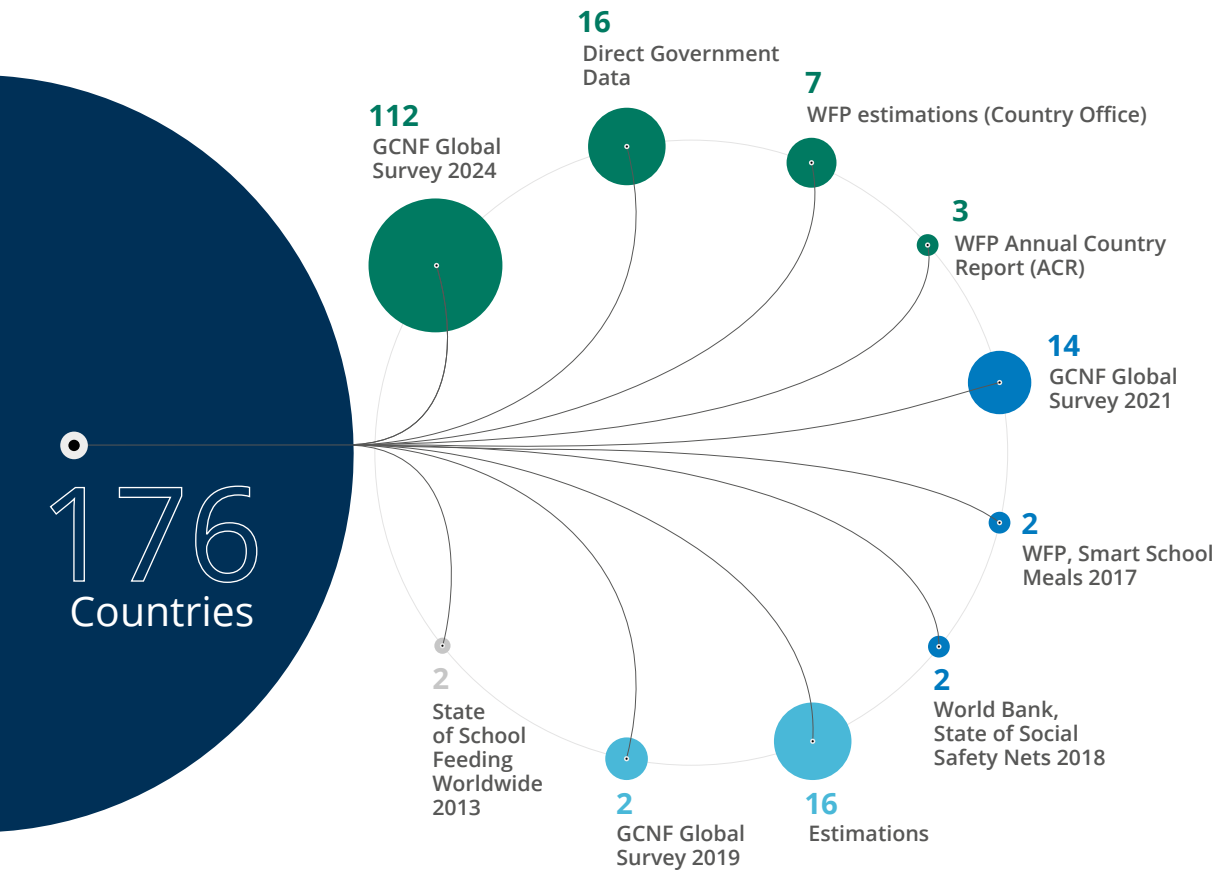


Table A2.1

Sources used for school meal data

Source	Symbol	Number of countries used in this report	Country names
Direct government data	OS	16	Belize, Brazil, China, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Iceland, India, Kenya, Mauritius, Mexico, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay.
USDA-sponsored, GCNF Global School Feeding Survey 2024	GCNF 2024	112	Afghanistan, Andorra, Angola, Armenia, Austria, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chile, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Finland, France, The Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Palau, Peru, Poland, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.
USDA-sponsored, GCNF Global School Feeding Survey 2021	GCNF 2021	14	Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Grenada, Guyana, Hungary, Italy, Kiribati, Panama, Portugal, Sudan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates.

USDA-sponsored, GCNF Global School Feeding Survey 2019	GCNF 2019	2	Comoros, Indonesia.
Estimations	Est.	16	Albania, Bahrain, Belarus, Bermuda, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, Kuwait, Nauru, Puerto Rico, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Seychelles, Singapore, Tonga, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).
WFP Estimations	WFP Est.	7	Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Lebanon, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia.
State of School Feeding Worldwide 2013	SOSF 2013	2	Australia, Hong Kong (China Special Administrative Region).
World Bank, State of Social Safety Nets 2018	SSSN	2	State of Palestine, Türkiye.
WFP, Smart School Meals 2017	SSM	2	Nicaragua, Paraguay.
WFP, Annual Country Reports 2024	WFP ACR	3	Algeria, Chad, Libya.

A2.2 Limitations

While the data set presented in this publication is only based on reliable sources, it has some limitations. The multiplicity of sources translates into differences of methodology: some sources report on all children receiving school meals in a particular country, but in other countries, only primary schoolchildren are reported.

Another limitation is the quantity of indicators provided by each source: the number of children is provided in all sources, but coverage data, funding data and other indicators were only available for a more limited set of countries. The analytics presented in this publication systematically specify the sample size available for each indicator.

Further, the data available do not allow for accurate confirmation of how many meals per day or per week children received, nor the exact type of meal (i.e. whether a snack or a proper meal).

The discrepancy in reference years is a third limitation of the data set presented in this publication. While some sources were published less than a year before this report was published, other sources are older and/or present data pertaining to earlier school years.

As for the *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022*, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of school meal programmes globally, this publication combines country data spanning almost a decade. This approach has been used in similar reports, such as the World Bank's State of Social Safety Nets 2018 and provides a good level of confidence for a majority of countries and for cross-country analytics and trends. The main advantage of this approach is its comprehensiveness, as it maximizes the number of countries for which a data point is available, but the potential lack of accuracy of some older data points remains an important limitation.

Finally, in addition to data spanning almost a decade, the reference year for the numerator and denominator to compute coverage sometimes does not match (i.e. data could be available for the number of children fed in primary schools, but the most recent data about number of children enrolled in primary school for that country could date back to one year before).

A2.3 Children receiving school meals

The number of children receiving school meals presented in this publication represents the total number of children benefiting from school meals in a given country.

While the majority of the children receiving school meals are supported by a government-funded and government-led school meal programme, some countries have opted for locally managed school meal programmes and/or collect contributions from parents to finance their school meal programmes. In keeping with the approach in the *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022*, beneficiaries of school meals should be understood as "children receiving meals, or another form of food, in schools" (not as "children benefiting from free and government-funded school meals").

When more than one school meal programme exists in a given country, the number presented in this publication is the total number of individual beneficiaries, net of overlaps if any. This operation is generally made by the individual data providers listed in section A2.1 and the net total corresponds to the number reported by each of these sources, but was verified as part of the data consolidation process. As for the 2022 edition, even in this report three possible configurations were found, as described in Table A2.2 below.

Table A2.2

Possible configurations of school meal programmes for the purpose of calculating net total number of children receiving school meals

Situation			Calculation of net total number of children receiving school meals
1	The country has only one school meal programme		The total number of children receiving school meals corresponds to the number of children receiving school meals as part of this programme.
2	The country has two or more school meal programmes	The programmes overlap: some (or all) children benefit from both programmes.	The number of beneficiaries does not add up. Depending on the situation, the size of the larger programme may correspond to the net total.
3		The programmes do not overlap: each programme benefits a distinct group of children.	The numbers of children receiving school meals add up: the net total corresponds to the sum of children of the different programmes.

A2.4 Coverage

School meals coverage in a country i (C_i) is defined as the number of children receiving school meals in primary schools in a given year (B_i) divided by the total number of children enrolled in primary schools in the same year (P_i). The result is multiplied by 100 to express the coverage as a percentage:

$$C_i = \frac{B_i}{P_i} * 100$$

Description of variables:
B_i: number of children receiving school meals in primary schools in country i, for a given year.
P_i: Total number of children enrolled in primary schools of country i, for the same year.
C_i: School meals coverage rate in primary schools in country i.

Formula for aggregation:
The following formula can be applied to calculate aggregate coverage for a group of countries x, such as income groups. The result is multiplied by 100 to express the coverage as a percentage:

$$C_x = \frac{\sum B_{i,x}}{\sum P_{i,x}} * 100$$

For each group of countries x, the total number of children receiving school meals $\sum B_{i,\,x}$ is divided by the total number of children enrolled $\sum P_{i,x.}$

Interpretation:

- Coverage estimates range between 0 and 100 percent.
- A higher value for the indicator denotes a higher number of children enrolled in primary education receiving school meals at school.

A2.4.1 School meals coverage in public schools

The inclusion of a school meals coverage indicator in the SDG 4 framework marks a significant milestone, filling a long-standing gap in global monitoring systems by enabling the tracking of school meal programme reach worldwide. For the first time, the international community can rely on a standardized and globally comparable estimate of the proportion of primary school-aged children receiving school meals. While this approach ensures consistency across countries, additional analyses can help provide a more nuanced understanding of coverage and policy implications.

In this annex we offer an initial complementary analysis for a sample of countries, which will be expanded in future publications. This annex presents a recalculation of coverage to estimate the scale of government programmes within the public education system only. This additional analysis is motivated by the fact that in a significant number of countries school meals policies, programmes and allocated resources only target public schools. Furthermore, it is important to note the existing data gap on school meals provision in private schools.

The analysis draws on data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics on the proportion of primary school enrolment in private institutions. These figures are used to estimate enrolment in public schools and calculate an adjusted public coverage estimate using the following formula:

$$\text{Public school coverage (\%)} = \frac{\text{Number of primary schoolchildren receiving meals}}{\text{Enrolment in primary education x (1- Share of enrolment in primary education in private institutions)}} * 100$$

Table A2.3 presents estimated public school meals coverage for selected countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region for which relevant data was available. This complementary analysis is based on the understanding that government reported figures for school meals for the sample of countries in Table A2.3 only include public schools, while enrolment data includes both public and private institutions.

Table A2.3

Public coverage estimates (selected countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region)

	Total number of children receiving school meals (all levels)	Total number of children receiving school meals (primary)	Enrolment (primary) - UNESCO	Share of enrolment in primary educations in private institutions	Enrolment (primary) - public	Coverage (primary) SDG methodology	Public coverage (primary)
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2,619,090	1,233,764	1,394,417	9.83%	1,257,346	88%	98%
Chile	1,568,394	977,820	1,545,104	62.94%	572,616	63%	100%
Colombia	5,904,785	2,826,401	4,140,463	19.32%	3,340,526	68%	85%
Dominican Republic	1,648,304	873,601	1,155,182	19.38%	931,308	76%	94%
Guatemala	2,654,521	2,079,759	2,414,945	11.21%	2,144,230	86%	97%
Honduras	1,218,072	1,039,026	1,074,043	11.69%	948,487	97%	100%
Peru	4,243,054	2,708,077	3,819,011	25.56%	2,842,872	71%	95%

This method complements the SDG 4 indicator by offering governments and partners an additional lens through which to assess national progress towards universal school meals coverage. While this analysis currently focuses on selected countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region, it is intended as a first step, with the aim of extending it to other regions globally as data availability improves.

Box A2.1

Income classification of countries

This publication follows the World Bank's classification of countries by income groups. The classification of countries used in this publication is the "2025 fiscal year", which is based on 2023 gross national income (GNI) per capita (*Atlas method*), and calculated as follows:

Income category	GNI per capita thresholds
Low-income countries	US$1,145 or less
Lower-middle-income countries	between US$1,146 and US$4,515
Upper-middle-income countries	between US$4,516 and US$14,005
High-income countries	above US$14,005

The full list of countries included in each of these income groups is available on the *World Bank's website* and is reproduced in Annex III of the present publication.

PLEASE NOTE: Several countries have changed their income level classification compared to the previous edition. These countries include:

- American Samoa –› from Upper-middle to High
- Benin –› from Low to Lower-middle
- Bulgaria –› from Upper-middle to High
- Guinea –› from Low to Lower-middle
- Guyana –› from Upper-middle to High
- Haiti –› from Low to Lower-middle
- Indonesia –› from Lower-middle to Upper-middle
- Jordan –› from Upper-middle to Lower-middle
- Lebanon –› from Upper-middle to Lower-middle
- Mongolia –› from Lower-middle to Upper-middle
- Nauru –› from Upper-middle to High
- Nepal –› from Low to Lower-middle
- Republic of Moldova –› from Lower-middle to Upper-middle
- Romania –› from Upper-middle to High
- Russian Federation –› from Upper-middle to High
- Samoa –› from Upper-middle to Lower-middle
- Sri Lanka –› from Upper-middle to Lower-middle

- Sudan –› from Lower-middle to Low
- Tajikistan –› from Low to Lower-middle
- Ukraine –› from Lower-middle to Upper-middle
- United Republic of Tanzania –› from Low to Lower-middle
- Venezuela –› from Upper-middle to No Classification.

All income-based comparisons in this report use the fiscal year 2025 World Bank classification. This means that if a country's income group has changed since the previous edition, it is analysed here according to its fiscal year 2025 World Bank income classification.

Finally, Venezuela is excluded from all analyses disaggregated by income level, as it has lacked an official classification since fiscal year 2022.

A2.5 Annual financial investment in school meals

Calculations for the annual financial investment in school meals are presented in Table A2.4. Investment is defined as the total budget allocated to school meals, or an estimation of that budget. Information on country investments in school meals is not available in all countries, but available data are presented in this present publication. Only countries which have a school meal programme were included in the investment estimation.

Table A2.4

Four estimates of the total yearly investment in school meals

Source	Number of countries	Number of children	Investment value	Estimated global investment (US$)
Actual reported cost only	116	289.5 million	Budget allocated	65.6 billion
Estimations derived from reported costs	116	289.5 million	Average cost per income group	65.6 billion
Actual reported cost + estimations for remaining countries	173	463.5 million	Budget allocated for 116 countries which have data; average cost per income group for remaining 57 countries	84 billion
Estimations (all countries)	173	463.5 million	Average cost per income group	84 billion

The following methods used to estimate the global investment in school meal programmes as reported in Table A2.4 are as follows:

(1) Reported global investment: **US$65.6 billion**
Sample: **116 countries**

The first approach, which resulted in a figure of US$65.6 billion, is based on reported national budgets. According to this approach, the global investment $M_{(1)}$ is the sum of all reported national budgets (G_i) across these 116 countries for which data were available:

$$M_{(1)} = \sum_{i=1}^{116} G_i$$

(2) Estimated global investment: **US$65.6 billion**
Sample: **116 countries**

The second approach, which resulted in a figure of US$65.6 billion, is an alternative estimation for the same sample of countries as the first estimation. Instead of using reported budget figures, total investment $M_{(2)}$ was estimated as the total average cost (AC) from income group (x) multiplied by the number of beneficiaries (B) in country (i) across the 116 countries:

$$M_{(2)} = \sum_{x=1}^{116} (AC_x \times B_i)$$

Presents the average cost per income group as used for this calculation.

Table A2.5

Average cost per income group used for estimating global investment

Income category	Average cost used for estimations
Low-income countries	US$22.09
Lower-middle-income countries	US$23.89
Upper-middle-income countries	US$84.18
High-income countries	US$665.76

(3) Estimated global investment: **US$84 billion**
Sample: **173 countries**

The third approach, which resulted in a figure of US$84 billion, was calculated using the two previously discussed methods, applied to a broader sample to include not only countries with reported investment data (n=116) but also countries with no data, based on reported beneficiaries.

To the US$65.6 billion figure estimated using approach (1), it adds an estimation using approach (2) for an additional 57 countries which are known to have a national school meal programme, and for which no reported investment data were available. The number of children receiving school meals, as reported in this publication, was multiplied for each country by the total average cost corresponding to the income group of that country (Table A2.5). The resulting values were summed up across the set of 57 countries and to the estimation obtained using Method 1 ($M_{(1)}$). The full calculation for Method 3 ($M_{(3)}$) is described as follows:

$$M_{(3)} = M_{(1)} + \sum_{i=1}^{57} (AC_x \times B_i)$$

(4) Estimated global investment: **US$84 billion**
Sample: **173 countries**

The fourth method ($M_{(4)}$), which resulted in a figure of US$84 billion, was calculated using method 2, applied to the full sample of countries where data on the number of children receiving school meals were available. As described above, the number of children as reported in the present publication was multiplied by the total average cost per income group of the country, and these values were summed up across the full set of 173 countries. This calculation can be summarized by the equation below:

$$M_{(4)} = \sum_{i=1}^{173} (AC_x \times B_i)$$

Annex III
Country-specific indicators of school meals

To enable cross-country comparability, coverage estimates in this annex follow the SDG 4 methodology based on total enrolment in primary schools (public and private). However, countries may have higher coverage rates in public schools, including universal coverage, as shown in Annex A2.4.1 for selected Latin American countries.

		SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
COUNTRY	Income Level	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Afghanistan	L	**2018**	1,341,812	*Est*		**2018**	1,341,812	*Est*		**2022**	911,741	*GCNF 2024*	
Albania	UM	**2018**	99,041	*Est*		**2018**	99,041	*Est*		**2018**	99,041	*Est*	
Algeria**	UM	**2019**	39,632	*WFP ACR*	1%	**2019**	39,632	*WFP ACR*	1%	**2023**	40,196	*WFP ACR*	
American Samoa	H												
Andorra	H					**2020-2021**	1,334	*GCNF 2021*	13%	**2022-2023**	1,345	*GCNF 2024*	13%
Angola	LM	**2017**	1,516,133	*AUSSF*	27%	**2017**	1,516,133	*AUSSF*	27%	**2022-2023**	1,890,610	*GCNF 2024*	33%*
Antigua and Barbuda	H	**2018**	8,560	*Est*		**2020-2021**	6,951	*GCNF 2021*	68%	**2020-2021**	6,951	*GCNF 2021*	
Argentina	UM	**2015**	1,687,785	*SSSN*	36%	**2020**	2,810,772	*GCNF 2021*	44%	**2020**	2,810,772	*GCNF 2021*	
Armenia	UM	**2018**	103,101	*Est*	65%	**2020-2021**	105,630	*GCNF 2021*	66%	**2022-2023**	116,262	*GCNF 2024*	65%
Aruba	H												
Australia	H	**2012**	4,800	*SOSF 2013*	0%	**2012**	4,800	*SOSF 2013*	0%	**2012**	4,800	*SOSF 2013*	
Austria	H					**2020-2021**	475,738	*GCNF 2021*	59%	**2022-2023**	476,801	*GCNF 2024*	60%*
Azerbaijan	UM												
Bahamas	H					**2020-2021**	6,000	*GCNF 2021*	12%	**2022-2023**	6,673	*GCNF 2024*	18%

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Bahrain	H	**2018**	96,300	*Est*		**2018**	96,300	*Est*		**2018**	96,300	*Est*	
Bangladesh	LM	**2018**	2,964,528	*Est*	15%	**2020**	2,971,370	*GCNF 2021*	15%	**2022**	2,947,899	*GCNF 2024*	14%
Barbados	H	**2018**	17,097	*Est*		**2020-2021**	25,645	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2020-2021**	25,645	*GCNF 2021*	
Belarus	UM	**2018**	247,949	*Est*		**2018**	247,949	*Est*		**2018**	247,949	*Est*	
Belgium	H					**2020-2021**	287,151	*GCNF 2021*	23%	**2022-2023**	486,479	*GCNF 2024*	39%*
Belize	UM	**2018**	29,426	*Est*		**2020-2021**	0	*GCNF 2021*		**2024**	7,633	*OS*	11%*
Benin	LM	**2018**	460,063	*Est*	21%	**2020-2021**	835,453	*GCNF 2021*	38%	**2022-2023**	1,267,366	*GCNF 2024*	52%*
Bermuda	H	**2018**	3,507	*Est*		**2018**	3,507	*Est*		**2018**	3,507	*Est*	
Bhutan	LM	**2018**	74,726	*GCNF 2019*	19%	**2021**	101,762	*GCNF 2021*	33%	**2022**	98,133	*GCNF 2024*	38%
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	LM	**2013**	2,383,408	*SSM*	100%	**2013**	2,383,408	*SSM*	100%	**2024**	2,619,090	*WFP Est*	88%*
Bosnia and Herzegovina	UM	**2018**	92,386	*Est*		**2020-2021**	27,698	*GCNF 2021*		**2022-2023**	66,262	*GCNF 2024*	19%
Botswana	UM	**2018**	358,854	*GCNF 2019*	100%	**2020**	569,514	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022**	364,859	*GCNF 2024*	96%
Brazil	UM	**2019**	40,197,071	*OS*	100%	**2020**	40,200,000	*Est*	100%	**2024**	38,531,387	*OS*	100%*
British Virgin Islands	H												
Brunei Darussalam	H					**2021**	34,669	*GCNF 2021*	73%	**2021**	34,669	*GCNF 2021*	
Bulgaria	H	**2018**	151,852	*Est*		**2020-2021**	432,749	*GCNF 2021*	93%	**2022-2023**	420,993	*GCNF 2024*	97%*
Burkina Faso	L	**2018**	3,863,926	*Est*	100%	**2020-2021**	3,689,774	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	4,449,106	*GCNF 2024*	100%
Burundi	L	**2019**	613,452	*WFP ACR*	28%	**2020-2021**	520,613	*GCNF 2021*	23%	**2022-2023**	743,570	*GCNF 2024*	
Cabo Verde	LM	**2015**	3,168	*SSSN*	5%	**2020-2021**	85,117	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	90,754	*GCNF 2024*	
Cambodia	LM	**2019**	281,385	*WFP ACR*	13%	**2020-2021**	277,881	*GCNF 2021*	12%	**2022-2023**	299,366	*GCNF 2024*	12%

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Cameroon	LM	**2018**	18,315	*GCNF 2019*	0%	**2020-2021**	195,042	*GCNF 2021*	4%	**2022-2023**	174,408	*GCNF 2024*	3%
Canada	H	**2012**	292,645	*SOSF 2013*	12%	**2012**	292,645	*SOSF 2013*	12%	**2022-2023**	1,173,731	*GCNF 2024*	
Cayman Islands	H												
Central African Republic	L	**2019**	241,957	*WFP ACR*	30%	**2020-2021**	215,411	*GCNF 2021*	26%	**2022-2023**	*173,212*	*GCNF 2024*	
Chad	L	**2019**	138,078	*WFP ACR*	6%	**2020-2021**	122,251	*GCNF 2021*	5%	**2023**	*342,000*	*WFP ACR*	8%
Chanel Islands	H												
Chile	H	**2015**	1,828,556	*SSSN*	100%	**2020**	2,029,882	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022**	*1,568,394*	*GCNF 2024*	63%
China	UM	**2019**	40,000,000	*OS*	39%	**2020-2021**	37,000,000	*GCNF 2021*	25%	**2023**	*34,570,000*	*OS*	22%
China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region	H	**2008**	243,984	*SOSF 2013*	67%	**2008**	243,984	*SOSF 2013*	67%	**2008**	*243,984*	*SOSF 2013*	
China, Macao Special Administrative Region	H												
China, Taiwan, Province of China	H												
Colombia	UM	**2018**	5,387,504	*Est*	63%	**2018**	5,387,504	*Est*	65%	**2023**	*5,904,785*	*OS*	68%*
Comoros	LM												
Congo	LM	**2019**	141,961	*WFP ACR*		**2020-2021**	142,450	*GCNF 2021*		**2022-2023**	*178,219*	*GCNF 2024*	20%
Costa Rica	UM	**2014**	691,294	*SSSN*	100%	**2014**	691,294	*SSSN*	100%	**2022**	*830,688*	*GCNF 2024*	100%
Côte d'Ivoire	LM	**2018**	976,443	*Est*	25%	**2020-2021**	1,024,401	*GCNF 2021*	25%	**2022-2023**	*977,631*	*GCNF 2024*	21%
Croatia	H	**2012**	151,514	*SOSF 2013*	93%	**2020-2021**	405,136	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	*422,728*	*GCNF 2024*	100%*

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Cuba	UM	**2015**	827,070	*SSM*	100%	**2015**	827,070	*SSM*	100%	**2024-2025**	*849,274*	*OS*	
Curaçao	H												
Cyprus	H	**2019**	14,717	*Est*	14%	**2020-2021**	13,263	*GCNF 2021*	10%	**2022-2023**	*14,502*	*GCNF 2024*	11%*
Czechia	H	**2019**	1,351,000	*Est*	100%	**2020-2021**	1,444,077	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	*1,243,429*	*GCNF 2024*	92%*
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	L	**2018**	318,168	*Est*		**2018**	318,168	*Est*		**2018**	318,168	*Est*	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	L	**2019**	124,485	*WFP ACR*	1%	**2020-2021**	165,000	*GCNF 2021*	1%	**2022-2023**	222,800	*GCNF 2024*	1%
Denmark	H												
Djibouti	LM	**2019**	19,590	*WFP ACR*	29%	**2019**	19,590	*WFP ACR*	28%	**2022-2023**	24,590	*GCNF 2024*	23%
Dominica	UM	**2018**	4,245	*Est*		**2018**	4,245	*Est*		**2022-2023**	3,442	*GCNF 2024*	36%
Dominican Republic	UM	**2016**	1,739,355	*SSM*	100%	**2016**	1,739,355	*SSM*	100%	**2022**	1,648,304	*GCNF 2024*	76%
Ecuador	UM	**2015**	2,873,148	*SSM*	100%	**2020-2021**	2,941,952	*GCNF 2021*	84%	**2023**	2,862,662	*OS*	98%
Egypt	LM	**2018**	11,201,245	*Est*	77%	**2018**	11,201,245	*Est*	73%	**2024**	13,700,000	*WFP Est*	85%*
El Salvador	UM												
Equatorial Guinea	UM												
Eritrea	L												
Estonia	H	**2018**	72,402	*Est*		**2020-2021**	221,479	*GCNF 2021*	99%	**2022-2023**	233,774	*GCNF 2024*	100%*
Eswatini	LM	**2018**	365,089	*GCNF 2019*	100%	**2020**	379,336	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022**	353,546	*GCNF 2024*	
Ethiopia	L	**2018**	2,539,286	*GCNF 2019*	16%	**2020-2021**	1,676,452	*GCNF 2021*	8%	**2022-2023**	6,911,733	*GCNF 2024*	44%
Faroe Islands	H												
Fiji	UM	**2018**	40,078	*Est*	19%	**2018**	40,078	*Est*	18%	**2018**	40,078	*Est*	

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Finland	H	**2018**	840,000	*Est*	99%	**2020-2021**	920,700	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	1,056,288	*GCNF 2024*	99%*
France	H	**2015**	6,000,000	*OS*	70%	**2020-2021**	9,294,500	*GCNF 2021*	76%	**2022-2023**	9,563,276	*GCNF 2024*	87%*
French Polynesia	H												
Gabon	UM												
The Gambia	L	**2018**	165,422	*GCNF 2019*	41%	**2020-2021**	261,231	*GCNF 2021*	47%	**2022-2023**	268,514	*GCNF 2024*	47%
Georgia	UM												
Germany	H												
Ghana	LM	**2017**	1,700,000	*AUSSF*	39%	**2020-2021**	3,448,065	*GCNF 2021*	55%	**2022**	3,600,000	*GCNF 2024*	76%
Gibraltar	H												
Greece	H	**2018**	6,130	*Est*	0%	**2020-2021**	4,870	*GCNF 2021*	0%	**2022-2023**	157,181	*GCNF 2024*	26%*
Greenland	H												
Grenada	UM	**2012**	7,051	*SSSN*	53%	**2020-2021**	6,000	*GCNF 2021*	53%	**2020-2021**	6,000	*GCNF 2021*	
Guam	H												
Guatemala	UM	**2018**	2,459,053	*Est*	84%	**2020**	2,526,650	*GCNF 2021*	87%	**2022**	2,654,521	*GCNF 2024*	86%
Guinea	LM	**2018**	374,885	*Est*		**2020-2021**	218,714	*GCNF 2021*	10%	**2022-2023**	172,527	*GCNF 2024*	
Guinea-Bissau	L	**2019**	178,083	*WFP ACR*		**2020-2021**	224,986	*GCNF 2021*		**2022-2023**	267,799	*GCNF 2024*	
Guyana	H	**2019**	13,539	*GCNF 2019*		**2020-2021**	81,712	*GCNF 2021*		**2020-2021**	81,712	*GCNF 2021*	
Haiti	LM	**2016**	876,000	*SSM*		**2020-2021**	857,350	*GCNF 2021*		**2022-2023**	1,130,978	*GCNF 2024*	
Honduras	LM	**2018**	1,300,000	*Est*	80%	**2020**	1,256,227	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	1,218,072	*GCNF 2024*	97%
Hungary	H	**2019**	1,004,376	*Est*	100%	**2020-2021**	989,550	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2020-2021**	989,550	*GCNF 2021*	
Iceland	H					**2020-2021**	83,845	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2024**	66,592	*OS*	

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
India	LM	**2019**	90,414,539	*OS*	63%	**2020-2021**	106,000,000	*Est*	55%	**2023**	118,000,000	*OS*	
Indonesia	UM	**2018**	100,136	*GCNF 2019*	0%	**2018**	100,136	*GCNF 2019*	0%	**2018**	100,136	*GCNF 2019*	
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	UM	**2012**	2,812	*SOSF 2013*	0%	**2012**	2,812	*SOSF 2013*	0%	**2024**	8,727	*WFP Est*	
Iraq	UM	**2019**	633,351	*Est*		**2020-2021**	350,000	*GCNF 2021*		**2022-2023**	450,000	*GCNF 2024*	
Ireland	H	**2008**	91,152	*SOSF 2013*	16%	**2020-2021**	219,487	*GCNF 2021*	26%	**2022-2023**	261,005	*GCNF 2024*	30%*
Isle of Man	H												
Israel	H	**2018**	775,557	*Est*		**2020-2021**	448,530	*GCNF 2021*	18%	**2022-2023**	481,813	*GCNF 2024*	24%*
Italy	H	**2018**	2,454,385	*Est*		**2020-2021**	1,402,235	*GCNF 2021*	21%	**2020-2021**	1,402,235	*GCNF 2021*	
Jamaica	UM	**2012**	311,000	*SOSF 2013*	100%	**2020-2021**	131,663	*GCNF 2021*	33%	**2022-2023**	103,879	*GCNF 2024*	21%
Japan	H	**2018**	8,863,908	*OS*	96%	**2018**	8,863,908	*OS*	96%	**2022-2023**	9,258,701	*GCNF 2024*	99%*
Jordan	LM	**2019**	419,327	*WFP ACR*	37%	**2019**	419,327	*WFP ACR*	37%	**2022-2023**	490,000	*GCNF 2024*	40%
Kazakhstan	UM	**2019**	3,058,747	*GCNF 2019*	95%	**2020-2021**	3,058,747	*GCNF 2021*	88%	**2022-2023**	2,470,282	*GCNF 2024*	68%
Kenya	LM	**2018**	1,754,000	*Est*	21%	**2020-2021**	1,800,000	*GCNF 2021*	22%	**2024**	2,600,000	*OS*	
Kiribati	LM					**2020**	3,000	*GCNF 2021*		**2020**	3,000	*GCNF 2021*	
Kosovo	UM												
Kuwait	H	**2018**	236,744	*Est*		**2018**	236,744	*Est*	85%	**2018**	236,744	*Est*	
Kyrgyzstan	LM	**2018**	595,000	*GCNF 2019*	100%	**2020-2021**	66,443	*GCNF 2021*	12%	**2022-2023**	545,114	*GCNF 2024*	89%
Lao People's Democratic Republic	LM	**2018**	195,546	*Est*	21%	**2020-2021**	183,529	*GCNF 2021*	21%	**2022-2023**	240,000	*GCNF 2024*	28%
Latvia	H	**2018**	102,751	*Est*		**2020-2021**	264,551	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	276,963	*GCNF 2024*	100%*
Lebanon	LM	**2019**	31,929	*WFP ACR*	6%	**2019**	31,929	*WFP ACR*	6%	**2024**	126,329	*WFP Est*	

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Lesotho	LM	**2018**	386,923	*Est*	90%	**2020**	363,461	*GCNF 2021*	85%	**2022**	302,983	*GCNF 2024*	80%
Liberia	L	**2019**	287,456	*Est*	24%	**2020-2021**	278,043	*GCNF 2021*	26%	**2022-2023**	517,076	*GCNF 2024*	47%*
Libya	UM	**2019**	20,754	*WFP ACR*		**2020-2021**	18,000	*GCNF 2021*		**2023**	61,709	*WFP ACR*	
Liechtenstein	H												
Lithuania	H	**2016**	635,500	*SSSN*	100%	**2020-2021**	317,087	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	*251,748*	*GCNF 2024*	100%*
Luxembourg	H	**2018**	31,671	*Est*		**2020-2021**	104,702	*GCNF 2021*	99%	**2022-2023**	*109,323*	*GCNF 2024*	97%*
Madagascar	L	**2018**	567,763	*Est*	12%	**2020-2021**	366,693	*GCNF 2021*	8%	**2022-2023**	*1,074,166*	*GCNF 2024*	18%
Malawi	L	**2018**	2,936,455	*Est*	65%	**2021**	2,803,891	*Est*	60%	**2022-2023**	*2,607,267*	*GCNF 2024*	48%
Malaysia	UM	**2018**	500,000	*GCNF 2019*	16%	**2020**	1,022,628	*GCNF 2021*	15%	**2022**	*1,008,794*	*GCNF 2024*	25%
Maldives	UM												
Mali	L	**2018**	514,842	*GCNF 2019*	19%	**2020-2021**	581,014	*GCNF 2021*	20%	**2022-2023**	*658,172*	*GCNF 2024*	19%
Malta	H	**2018**	21,291	*Est*		**2020-2021**	21,162	*GCNF 2021*	79%	**2022-2023**	*9,370*	*GCNF 2024*	35%*
Marshall Islands	UM	**2018**	4,603	*Est*		**2018**	4,603	*Est*		**2022-2023**	*12,282*	*GCNF 2024*	100%*
Mauritania	LM	**2019**	51,917	*WFP ACR*	8%	**2020-2021**	172,905	*GCNF 2021*	26%	**2022-2023**	*322,884*	*GCNF 2024*	37%
Mauritius	UM	**2011**	75,000	*SSSN*	84%	**2011**	75,000	*SSSN*	91%	**2024**	*70,332*	*OS*	79%*
Mexico	UM	**2015**	6,357,712	*SSM*	45%	**2020-2021**	6,518,168	*GCNF 2021*	47%	**2022-2023**	*6,117,617*	*OS*	29%*
Micronesia (Federated States of)	LM												
Monaco	H					**2020-2021**	6,071	*GCNF 2021*	99%	**2022-2023**	*4,220*	*GCNF 2024*	66%
Mongolia	UM	**2018**	309,355	*GCNF 2019*	99%	**2020-2021**	371,480	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	*382,002*	*GCNF 2024*	100%
Montenegro	UM												

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Morocco	LM	**2014**	1,267,109	*SSSN*	29%	**2014**	1,267,109	*SSSN*	28%	**2022-2023**	*1,442,797*	*GCNF 2024*	26%
Mozambique	L	**2019**	200,302	*WFP ACR*	3%	**2021**	304,819	*GCNF 2021*	4%	**2022**	*554,962*	*GCNF 2024*	7%
Myanmar	LM	**2019**	353,144	*WFP ACR*	7%	**2019**	353,144	*WFP ACR*	7%	**2022-2023**	*1,500,000*	*GCNF 2024*	
Namibia	UM	**2018**	365,854	*GCNF 2019*	75%	**2020**	398,100	*GCNF 2021*	67%	**2022-2023**	518,829	*GCNF 2024*	84%*
Nauru	H	**2018**	3,233	*Est*	100%	**2018**	3,233	*Est*	100%	**2018**	3,233	*Est*	
Nepal	LM	**2018**	636,000	*Est*	12%	**2020-2021**	3,240,128	*GCNF 2021*	76%	**2022-2023**	4,819,028	*GCNF 2024*	100%
Netherlands (Kingdom of the)	H					**2020-2021**	476,143	*GCNF 2021*	41%	**2022-2023**	514,980	*GCNF 2024*	40%*
New Caledonia	H												
New Zealand	H					**2020**	42,000	*GCNF 2021*	11%	**2022**	226,100	*GCNF 2024*	40%
Nicaragua	LM	**2015**	1,200,000	*SSM*		**2015**	1,200,000	*SSM*		**2015**	1,200,000	*SSM*	
Niger	L	**2018**	193,301	*GCNF 2019*	5%	**2020-2021**	612,713	*GCNF 2021*	17%	**2022-2023**	597,387	*GCNF 2024*	16%
Nigeria	LM	**2019**	9,829,603	*GCNF 2019*	38%	**2020-2021**	9,887,000	*GCNF 2021*	39%	**2022-2023**	9,990,862	*GCNF 2024*	
North Macedonia	UM					**2020-2021**	42,233	*GCNF 2021*	12%	**2022-2023**	48,865	*GCNF 2024*	12%*
Northern Mariana Islands	H												
Norway	H												
Oman	H												
Pakistan	LM	**2018**	10,405,277	*Est*		**2018**	10,405,277	*Est*		**2024**	10,041,132	*WFP Est*	
Palau	H	**2019**	2,264	*GCNF 2019*	100%	**2020-2021**	2,259	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	2,216	*GCNF 2024*	100%
Panama	H	**2018**	463,172	*Est*	95%	**2020**	385,340	*GCNF 2021*	71%	**2020**	385,340	*GCNF 2021*	
Papua New Guinea	LM												

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Paraguay	UM	**2014**	1,085,942	*SSM*	100%	**2014**	1,085,942	*SSM*	100%	**2014**	1,085,942	*SSM*	
Peru	UM	**2015**	2,398,480	*SSSN*	67%	**2020**	4,199,532	*GCNF 2021*	71%	**2022**	4,243,054	*GCNF 2024*	71%
Philippines	LM	**2019**	2,299,766	*Est*	16%	**2020-2021**	3,526,589	*GCNF 2021*	27%	**2022-2023**	3,651,028	*WFP Est*	28%
Poland	H	**2011**	730,000	*SSSN*	32%	**2020-2021**	1,826,050	*GCNF 2021*	75%	**2022-2023**	1,951,891	*GCNF 2024*	100%*
Portugal	H	**2018**	1,317,306	*GCNF 2019*	100%	**2020-2021**	1,135,742	*GCNF 2021*	50%	**2020-2021**	1,135,742	*GCNF 2021*	
Puerto Rico	H	**2018**	192,425	*Est*		**2018**	192,425	*Est*		**2018**	192,425	*Est*	
Qatar	H	**2018**	130,152	*Est*		**2018**	130,152	*Est*		**2018**	130,152	*Est*	
Republic of Korea	H									**2022-2023**	6,307,298	*GCNF 2024*	100%*
Republic of Moldova	UM	**2018**	305,300	*Est*	98%	**2018**	305,300	*Est*	99%	**2022-2023**	271,820	*GCNF 2024*	99%
Romania	H					**2020-2021**	1,905,735	*GCNF 2021*	96%	**2022-2023**	1,672,561	*GCNF 2024*	88%*
Russian Federation	H	**2019**	8,286,908	*OS*	100%	**2020**	13,957,969	*OS*	100%	**2023**	18,049,000	*OS*	96%
Rwanda	L	**2018**	724,059	*OS*	7%	**2018**	724,059	*OS*	7%	**2022-2023**	3,908,597	*OS*	92%
Saint Kitts and Nevis	H	**2018**	4,610	*Est*		**2020-2021**	3,406	*GCNF 2021*	56%	**2022-2023**	4,077	*GCNF 2024*	
Saint Lucia	UM	**2019**	6,824	*GCNF 2019*	41%	**2020-2021**	7,700	*GCNF 2021*	45%	**2022-2023**	8,157	*GCNF 2024*	49%
Saint Martin (French Part)	H												
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	UM	**2018**	7,650	*Est*		**2020-2021**	10,231	*GCNF 2021*	59%	**2022-2023**	7,500	*GCNF 2024*	62%
Samoa	LM												
San Marino	H					**2020-2021**	2,431	*GCNF 2021*	97%	**2022-2023**	2,191	*GCNF 2024*	100%
Sao Tome and Principe	LM	**2018**	46,766	*GCNF 2019*	99%	**2020-2021**	47,550	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	48,763	*GCNF 2024*	
Saudi Arabia	H	**2018**	2,789,606	*Est*		**2018**	2,789,606	*Est*		**2018**	2,789,606	*Est*	

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Senegal	LM	**2018**	587,810	*Est*	18%	**2018**	587,810	*Est*	17%	**2022-2023**	369,053	*GCNF 2024*	14%
Serbia	UM	**2018**	154,629	*Est*		**2018**	154,629	*Est*	60%	**2018**	154,629	*Est*	
Seychelles	H	**2018**	7,829	*Est*		**2018**	7,829	*Est*		**2018**	7,829	*Est*	
Sierra Leone	L	**2018**	836,000	*Est*	61%	**2020-2021**	485,674	*GCNF 2021*	28%	**2022-2023**	654,961	*GCNF 2024*	32%
Singapore	H	**2018**	198,433	*Est*		**2018**	198,433	*Est*		**2018**	198,433	*Est*	
Sint Maarten (Dutch part)	H												
Slovakia	H	**2018**	190,631	*Est*		**2020-2021**	631,493	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	775,045	*GCNF 2024*	100%*
Slovenia	H	**2018**	104,858	*Est*		**2020-2021**	167,228	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	178,205	*GCNF 2024*	100%*
Solomon Islands	LM												
Somalia	L	**2019**	164,708	*WFP ACR*		**2020-2021**	170,796	*GCNF 2021*		**2023**	197,000	*WFP Est*	42%
South Africa	UM	**2018**	9,200,000	*Est*	80%	**2020**	9,613,630	*GCNF 2021*	87%	**2022-2023**	9,322,860	*GCNF 2024*	78%*
South Sudan	L	**2019**	460,413	*WFP ACR*	36%	**2020**	338,243	*GCNF 2021*	26%	**2022**	583,584	*GCNF 2024*	34%*
Spain	H	**2016**	1,759,394	*OS*	28%	**2020-2021**	1,769,394	*GCNF 2021*	28%	**2022-2023**	1,985,686	*GCNF 2024*	35%*
Sri Lanka	LM	**2018**	1,467,465	*GCNF 2019*	84%	**2020**	1,067,243	*GCNF 2021*	62%	**2022**	1,077,911	*GCNF 2024*	66%
State of Palestine	LM	**2014**	65,000	*SSSN*	13%	**2014**	65,000	*SSSN*	13%	**2014**	65,000	*SSSN*	
Sudan	L	**2019**	1,361,789	*Est*	27%	**2020-2021**	1,890,277	*GCNF 2021*	39%	**2020-2021**	1,890,277	*GCNF 2021*	
Suriname	UM												
Sweden	H	**2012**	1,180,947	*SOSF 2013*	100%	**2020-2021**	2,177,882	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022-2023**	2,132,504	*GCNF 2024*	100%*
Switzerland	H	**2018**	81,000	*GCNF 2019*	13%	**2020-2021**	83,544	*GCNF 2021*	13%	**2022-2023**	390,442	*GCNF 2024*	39%*
Syrian Arab Republic	L	**2018**	1,308,648	*Est*	63%	**2020-2021**	651,728	*GCNF 2021*	42%	**2022-2023**	706,792	*GCNF 2024*	33%

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Tajikistan	LM	**2019**	416,899	*WFP ACR*	54%	**2020-2021**	433,000	*GCNF 2021*	56%	**2022-2023**	657,721	*GCNF 2024*	56%
Thailand	UM	**2019**	4,081,643	*GCNF 2019*	82%	**2020-2021**	3,939,102	*GCNF 2021*	63%	**2020-2021**	3,939,102	*GCNF 2021*	
Timor-Leste	LM	**2018**	302,447	*GCNF 2019*	100%	**2020**	323,846	*GCNF 2021*	100%	**2022**	272,563	*GCNF 2024*	100%
Togo	L	**2018**	91,319	*Est*	6%	**2020-2021**	133,008	*GCNF 2021*	8%	**2022-2023**	218,567	*GCNF 2024*	11%
Tonga	UM	**2018**	9,844	*Est*		**2018**	9,844	*Est*		**2018**	9,844	*Est*	
Trinidad and Tobago	H	**2019**	141,484	*Est*		**2020-2021**	25,524	*GCNF 2021*	17%	**2022-2023**	74,287	*GCNF 2024*	41%
Tunisia	LM	**2018**	360,000	*GCNF 2019*	22%	**2020-2021**	350,000	*GCNF 2021*	20%	**2022-2023**	390,000	*GCNF 2024*	22%
Türkiye	UM	**2013**	6,182,368	*SSSN*	100%	**2013**	6,182,368	*SSSN*	100%	**2013**	6,182,368	*SSSN*	
Turkmenistan	UM												
Turks and Caicos Islands	H												
Tuvalu	UM												
Uganda	L	**2018**	3,651,225	*GCNF 2019*	34%	**2020-2021**	1,452,717	*Est*	11%	**2022**	1,216,700	*GCNF 2024*	
Ukraine	UM	**2018**	762,256	*Est*		**2018**	762,256	*Est*		**2024**	1,965,671	*OS*	68%*
United Arab Emirates	H	**2019**	821,236	*Est*	85%	**2020-2021**	288,795	*GCNF 2021*	18%	**2020-2021**	288,795	*GCNF 2021*	
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	H	**2019**	1,275,318	*OS*	17%	**2019**	1,275,318	*OS*	17%	**2019**	1,275,318	*OS*	
United Republic of Tanzania	LM	**2017**	28,000	*AUSSF*	0%	**2017**	28,000	*AUSSF*	0%	**2022**	6,883,911	*GCNF 2024*	53%
United States of America	H	**2018**	30,000,000	*GCNF 2019*	100%	**2020-2021**	28,000,000	*GCNF 2021*	65%	**2022-2023**	30,100,000	*GCNF 2024*	74%*
United States Virgin Islands	H												

COUNTRY	Income Level	SOSF 2020				SOSF 2022				SOSF 2024			
		Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage	Reference year	Number of children receiving school meals	Source	Estimated coverage
Uruguay	H	**2018**	273,732	*Est*	66%	**2021**	208,176	*GCNF 2021*	69%	**2024**	201,415	*OS*	
Uzbekistan	LM	**2018**	1,129,906	*Est*		**2018**	1,129,906	*Est*		**2022-2023**	289,219	*GCNF 2024*	11%
Vanuatu	LM												
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	NA	**2018**	1,904,346	*Est*		**2018**	1,904,346	*Est*		**2018**	1,904,346	*Est*	
Viet Nam	LM												
Yemen	L	**2019**	680,000	*WFP ACR*	17%	**2019**	680,000	*WFP ACR*	17%	**2022-2023**	1,864,000	*GCNF 2024*	
Zambia	LM	**2018**	1,193,996	*Est*	31%	**2020**	2,075,631	*GCNF 2021*	57%	**2022**	2,361,020	*GCNF 2024*	
Zimbabwe	LM	**2018**	3,218,924	*GCNF 2019*	100%	**2020**	2,489,909	*GCNF 2021*	64%	**2022**	1,413,095	*GCNF 2024*	48%

* Coverage estimates derived using enrolment figures from the preceding year, due to the unavailability of data for the same reference period as the reported number of children receiving school meals.

** Algeria estimation reflects only the WFP-supported programme in the refugee camps.

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State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024

School meal programmes offer an opportunity to secure the future of the world's children, while simultaneously providing positive benefits to local economies and food systems. At this particular time in history, international development and humanitarian communities are going through a significant paradigm shift and reduction in available resources. This marks a need to transition to full national ownership of school meal programmes, whenever possible, and to ensure the continued prioritization of low-income countries and fragile contexts for external support.

This publication by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) on the State of School Feeding Worldwide marks an unprecedented expansion in coverage of school meal programmes globally. Four years since the creation of the School Meals Coalition, the true transformative potential of the initiative is now apparent. Coalition members have stepped up their efforts to expand and improve national school meal programmes, while at the same time shifting the global perception of school meals to a nationally owned powerful policy lever across all income levels and country contexts.

The fourth in a series of regular reports that WFP is committed to provide, the State of School Feeding Worldwide allows for the continuous overview of school meal programmes everywhere in the world, focusing on national programmes implemented by governments. Each subsequent report will continue to follow a similar format and structure and use the best available and most recent data sources to describe the scale and coverage of school meal programmes. The series is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of all advances in school meals, but rather the reports will provide updates and a summary of advances in research and practice. This is not a report of WFP activities in school meals, but an overview of all work on school meals worldwide, focused on the achievements of national and subnational actors and the support of all partners and stakeholders.

The full publication is available online at **www.wfp.org**

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