State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024
Executive Summary

WFP
World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES



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. To date, 108 nations have signed up to the Coalition, which is also supported by 144 partner organizations and six regional bodies.



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

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; Ethiopia, Burundi and Rwanda prioritized sustainability and scale-up through increased national budget allocations; and Ukraine and Indonesia recently introduced and committed to a rapid scale-up of their national school meal programmes to advance multiple development goals.



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

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.



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

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.

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.



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

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 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

Figure 1
The School Meals Coalition ecosystem: Multisectoral collaboration from local to global

School Meals Coalition secretariat
Partners
Cities
Initiatives
Regional bodies and governments

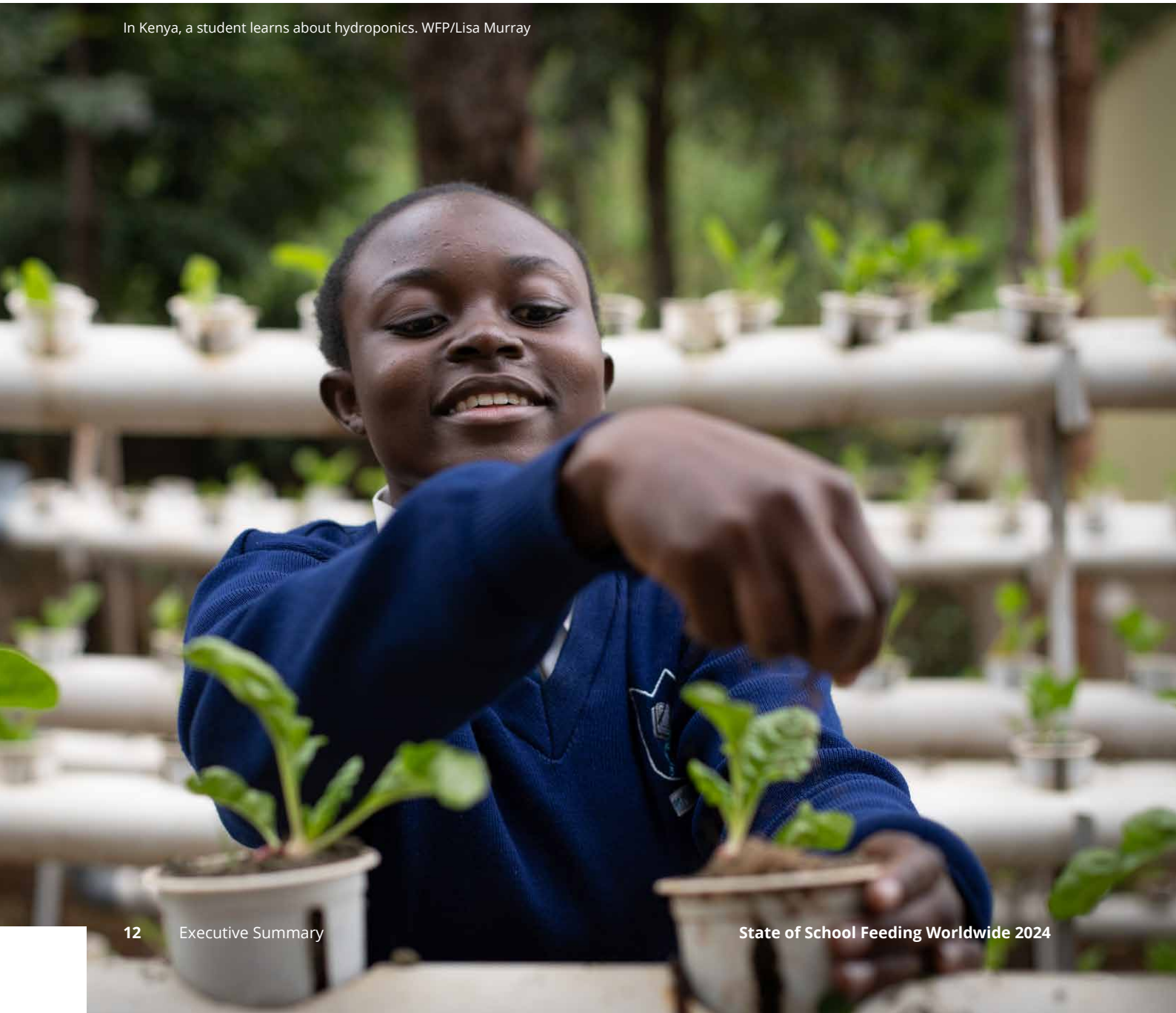


Disclaimer: This visualization is for illustrative purposes only and does not capture all aspects of the School Meals Coalition. The Coalition is rapidly evolving, so the information shown may become outdated at the time of publication.

The 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.

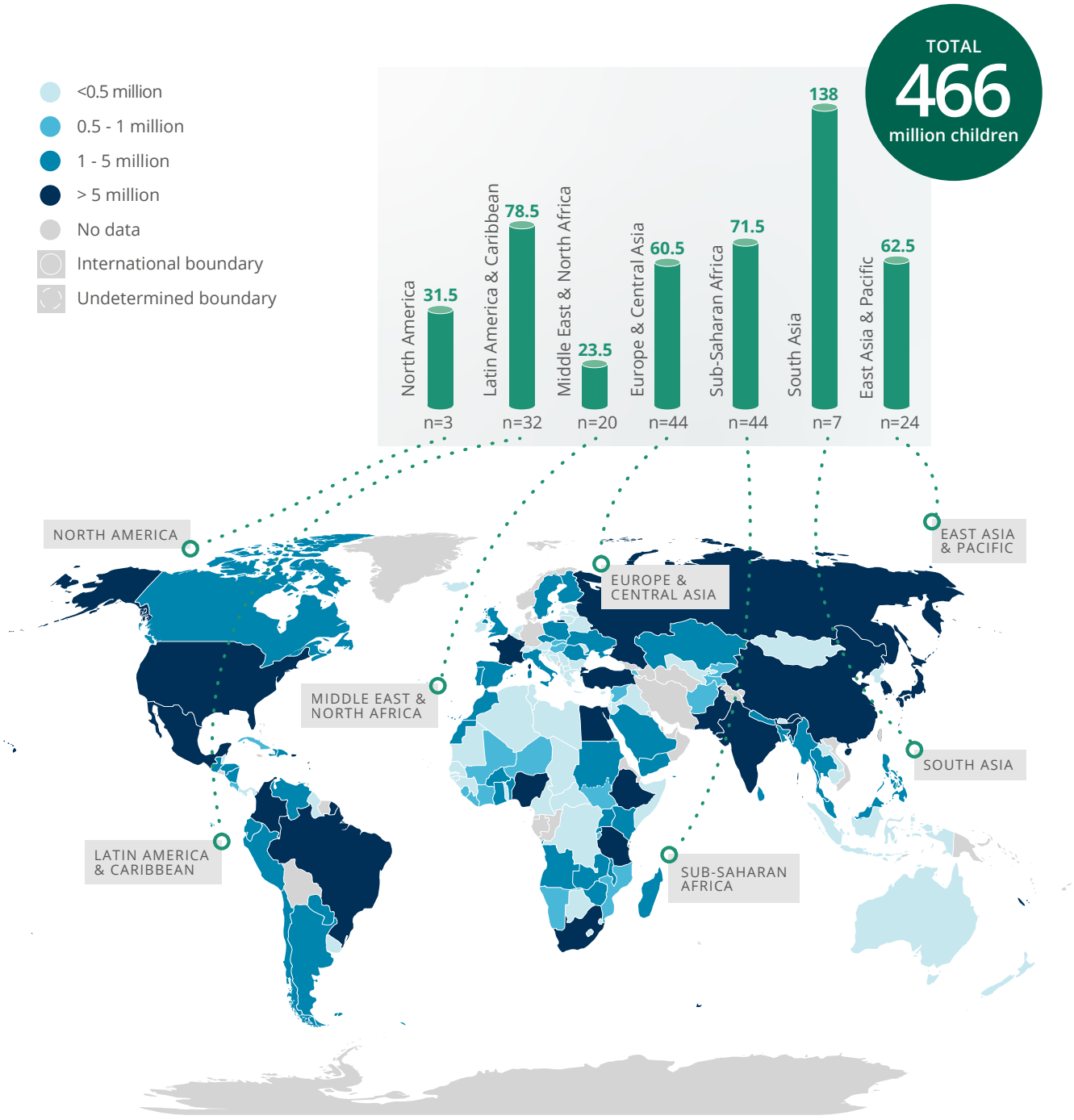


In Kenya, a student learns about hydroponics. WFP/Lisa Murray

Map 1

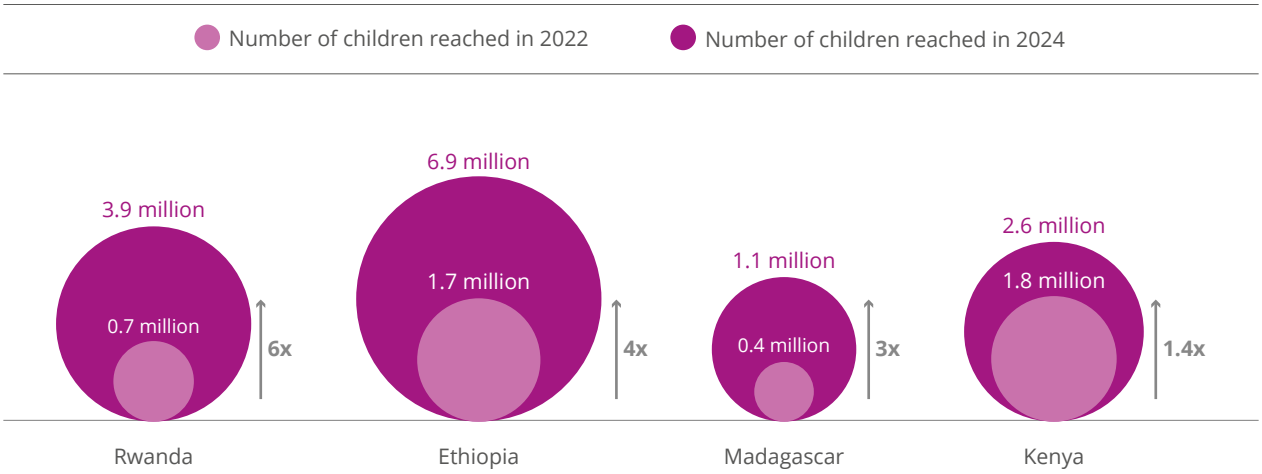
Children receiving school meals around the world (million)

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)

Figure 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)

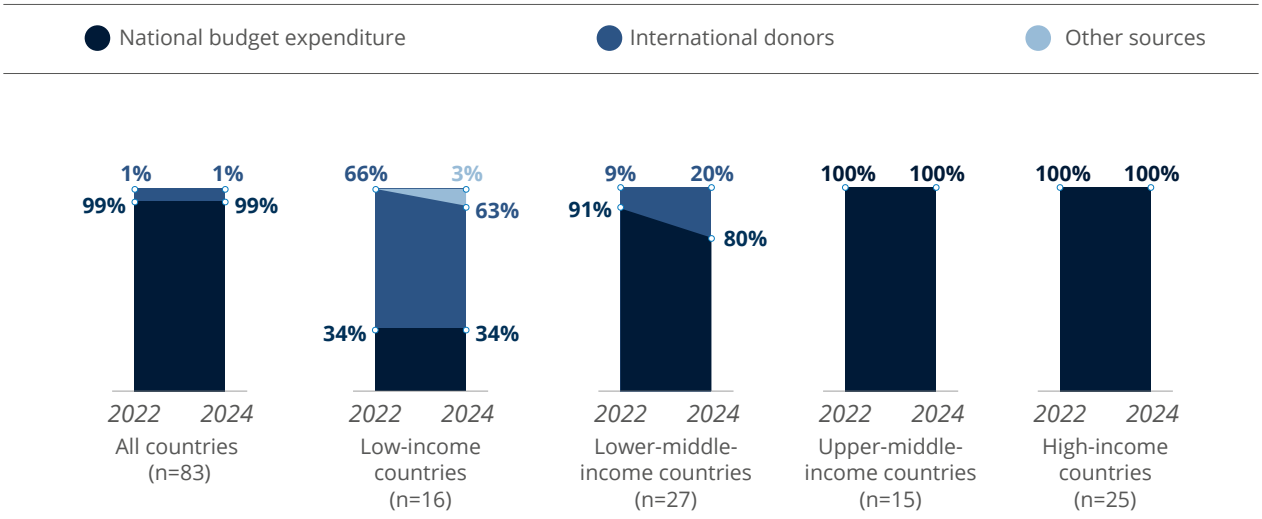
Investment in school meals has increased significantly with the new global estimate of US$84 billion representing an approximate US$36 billion expansion since the last estimate, with 99 percent of this increase coming from domestic budgets.

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.

Figure 3

Sources of financial investments in school meals in 2022 and 2024

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



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

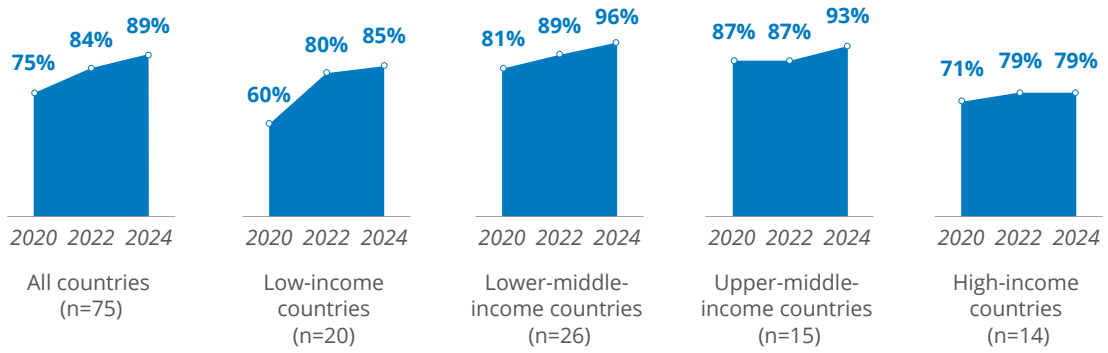
Across all regions and income levels countries have focused on strengthening the quality of school meals through the institutionalization and adoption of policies and legal frameworks.

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.

Figure 4

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

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.

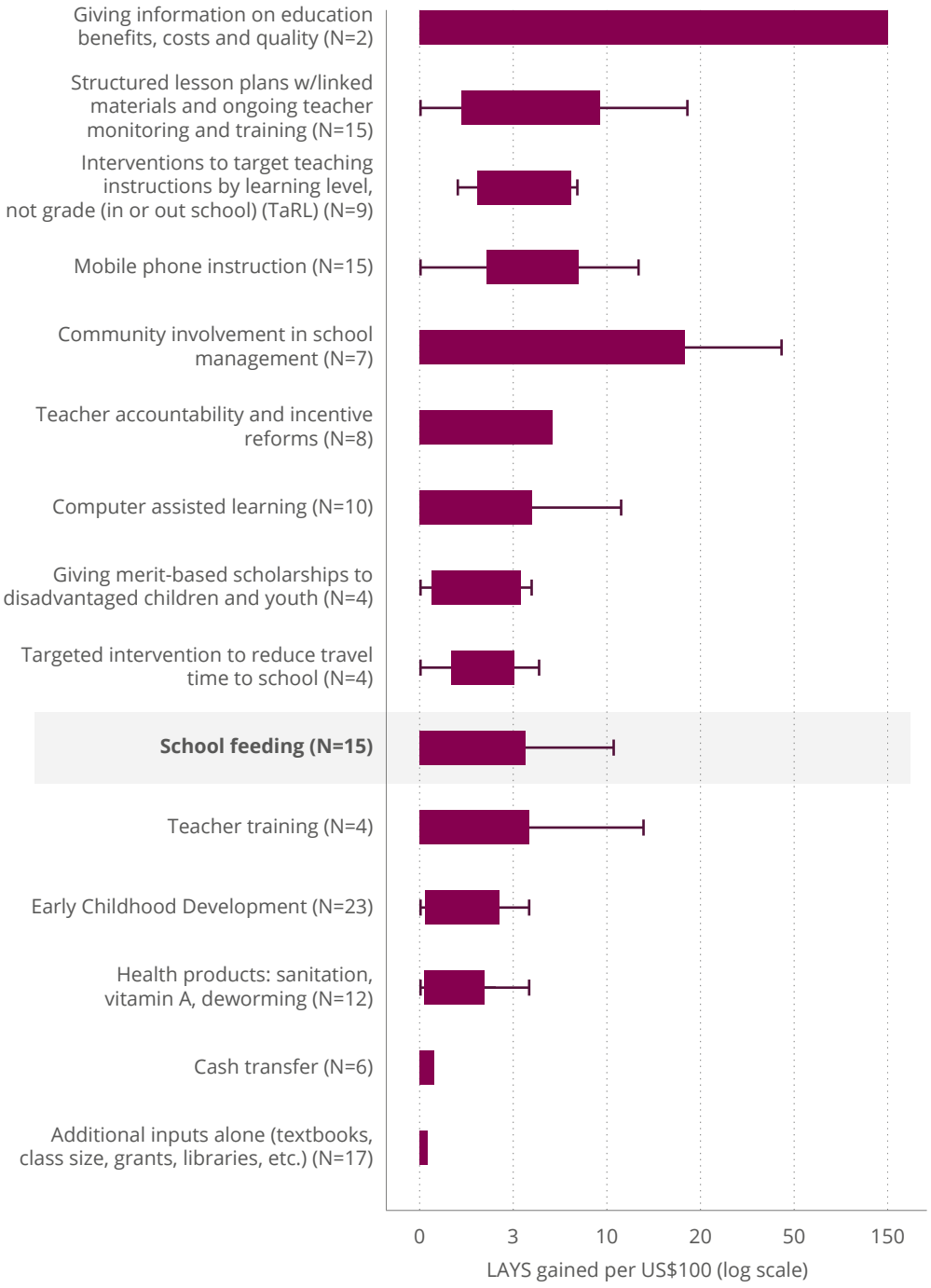
Emerging evidence from the most recent value-for-money studies, based on the additive benefits across several sectors (including health and nutrition, education, social protection, agriculture and local economies), show the positive cost–benefits of investment in school meal programmes across all studies 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.

Figure 5

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

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 Sierra Leone and Ghana.

- 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.

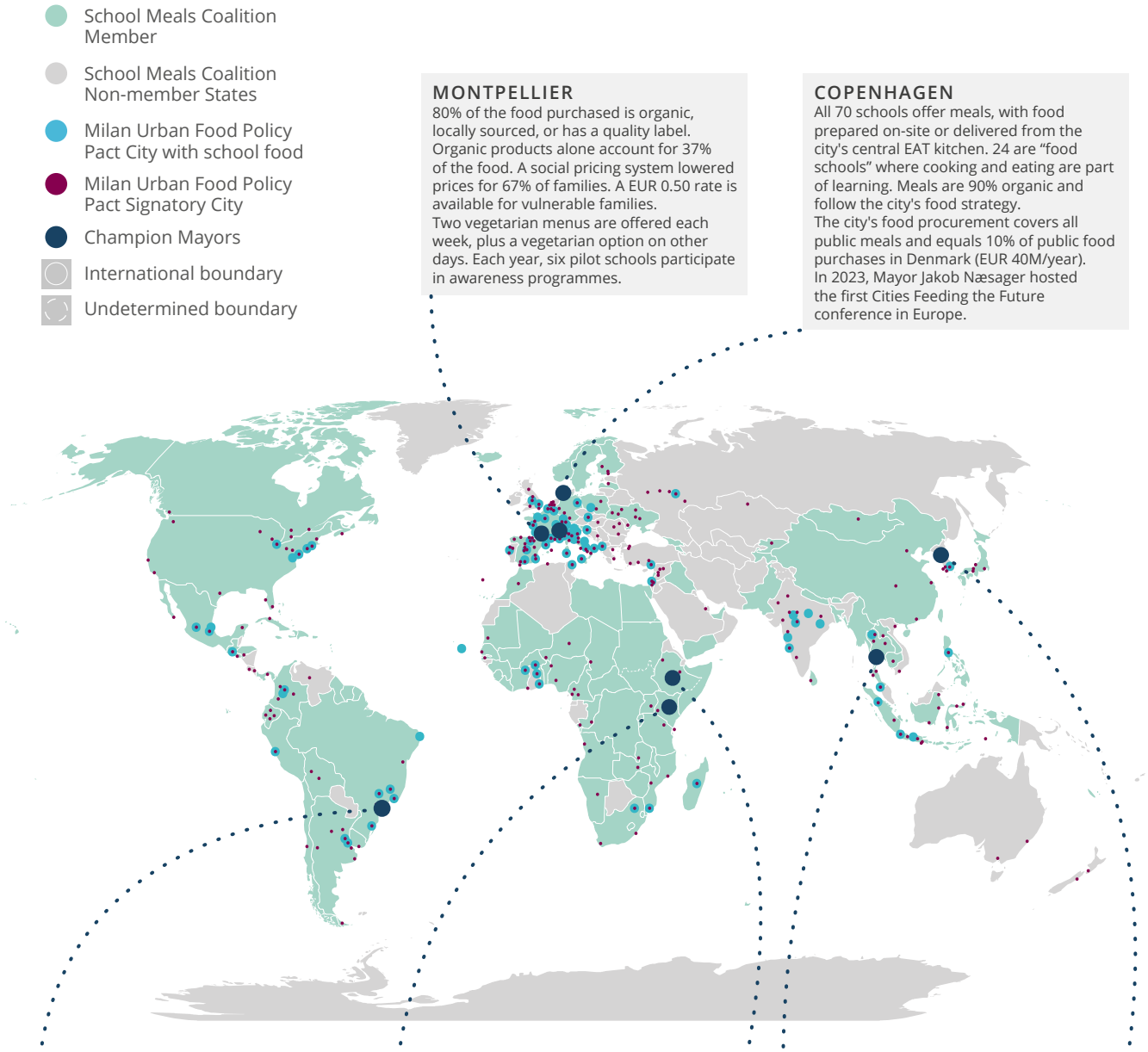
- Since its launch, the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative has for the first time collected data on the role and importance of subnational entities in school meal programming and delivery, while the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact has mobilized more than 300 cities to learn from each other.



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

Map 2

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



MONTPELLIER

80% of the food purchased is organic, locally sourced, or has a quality label. Organic products alone account for 37% of the food. A social pricing system lowered prices for 67% of families. A EUR 0.50 rate is available for vulnerable families.
Two vegetarian menus are offered each week, plus a vegetarian option on other days. Each year, six pilot schools participate in awareness programmes.

COPENHAGEN

All 70 schools offer meals, with food prepared on-site or delivered from the city's central EAT kitchen. 24 are "food schools" where cooking and eating are part of learning. Meals are 90% organic and follow the city's food strategy.
The city's food procurement covers all public meals and equals 10% of public food purchases in Denmark (EUR 40M/year).
In 2023, Mayor Jakob Næsager hosted the first Cities Feeding the Future conference in Europe.

SAO PAULO

995,755 children, adolescents, young people and adults receive at least two meals a day from 3,389 kitchens located in all educational units. At least 30% of ingredients for school meals are sourced from local family agriculture.
The Sustainable School Menu project in the city of São Paulo sets targets to progressively reduce the carbon footprint of school menus.

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 practise 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%.

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.

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.

Source: Cities Feeding the Future Initiative

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.

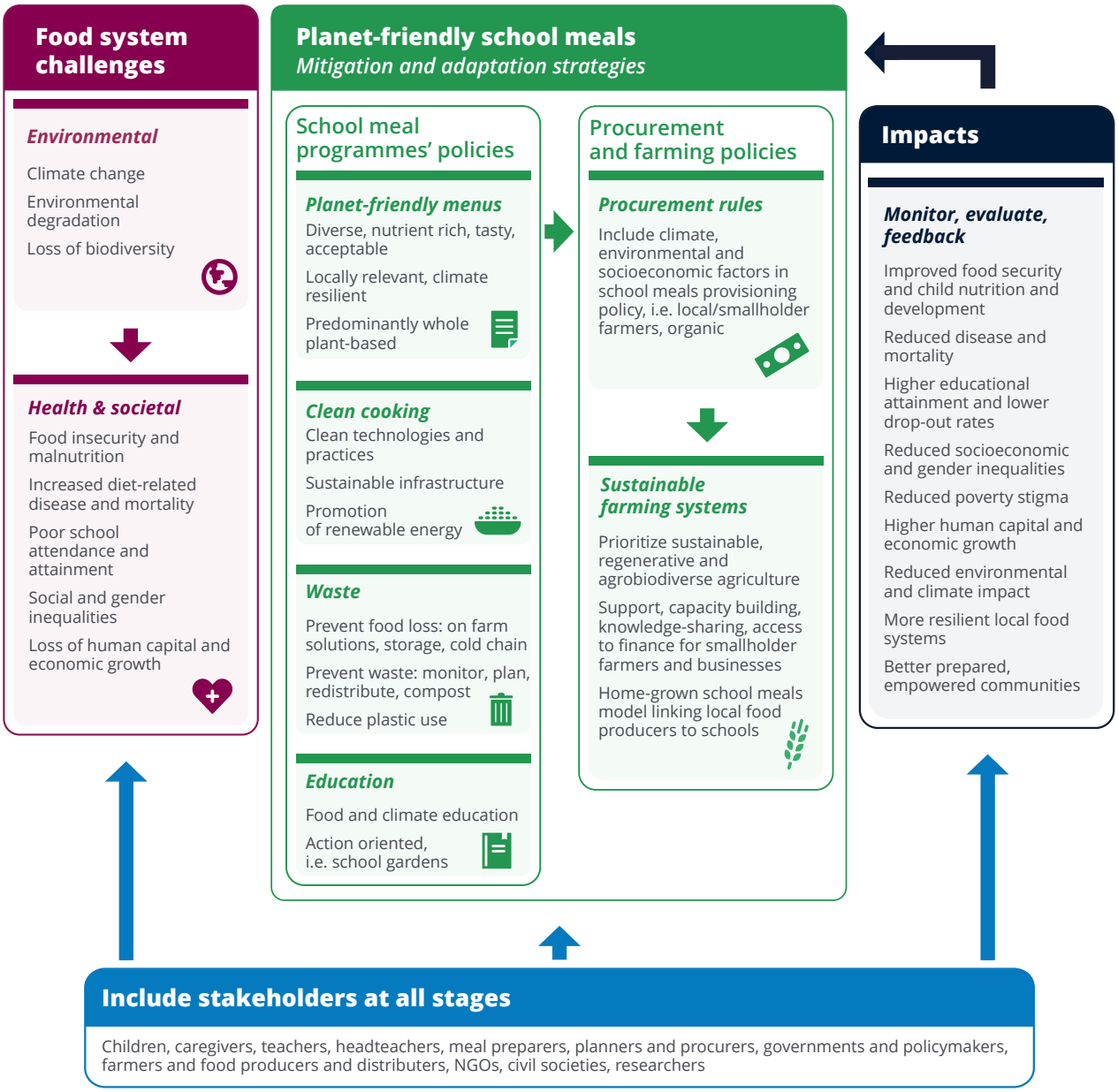
The conceptual and operational framework in the special chapter introduces changes in two sets of policies: (i) those directed at making immediate changes to school meal programmes in four key areas: menus, energy for cooking, waste and education about food; and (ii) demand-driven, planet-friendly procurement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



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

Figure S.R 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

WFP continues to adapt its leadership role in school meals 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.

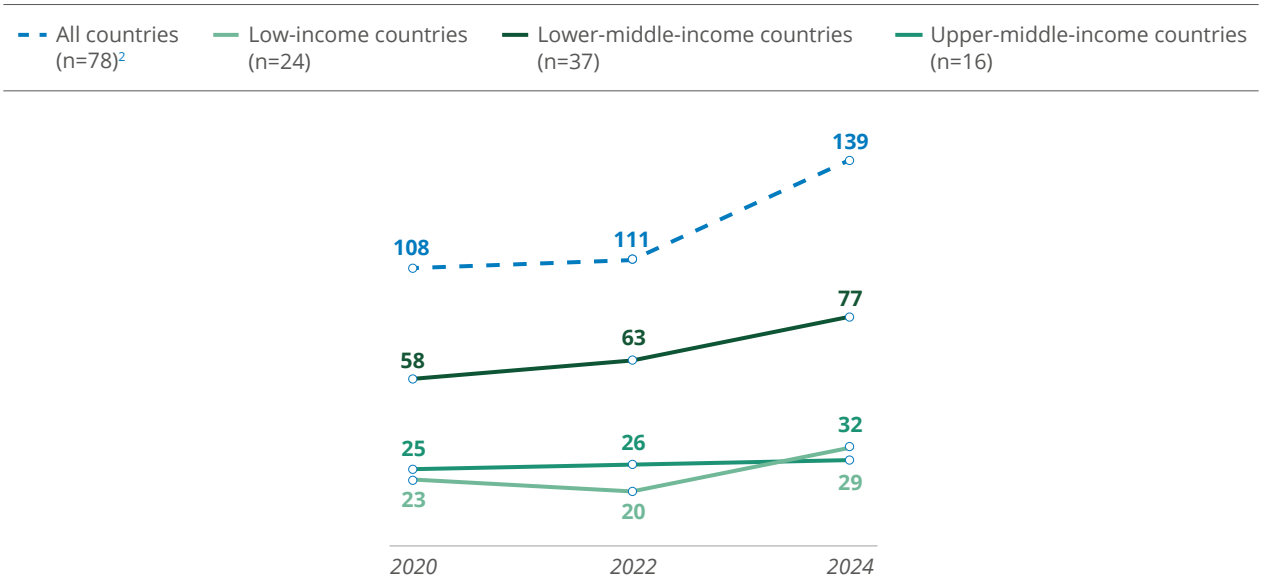
A further shift and recalibration within WFP's operational portfolio manifests in a renewed commitment to the institutionalization of school meal programmes at all income levels and support to national programmes delivered through local systems and institutions. Since 2020, an additional 31 million children have received school meals in 78 countries supported by WFP,[1] 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.

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

Figure 6

Number of children reached (in millions) 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)

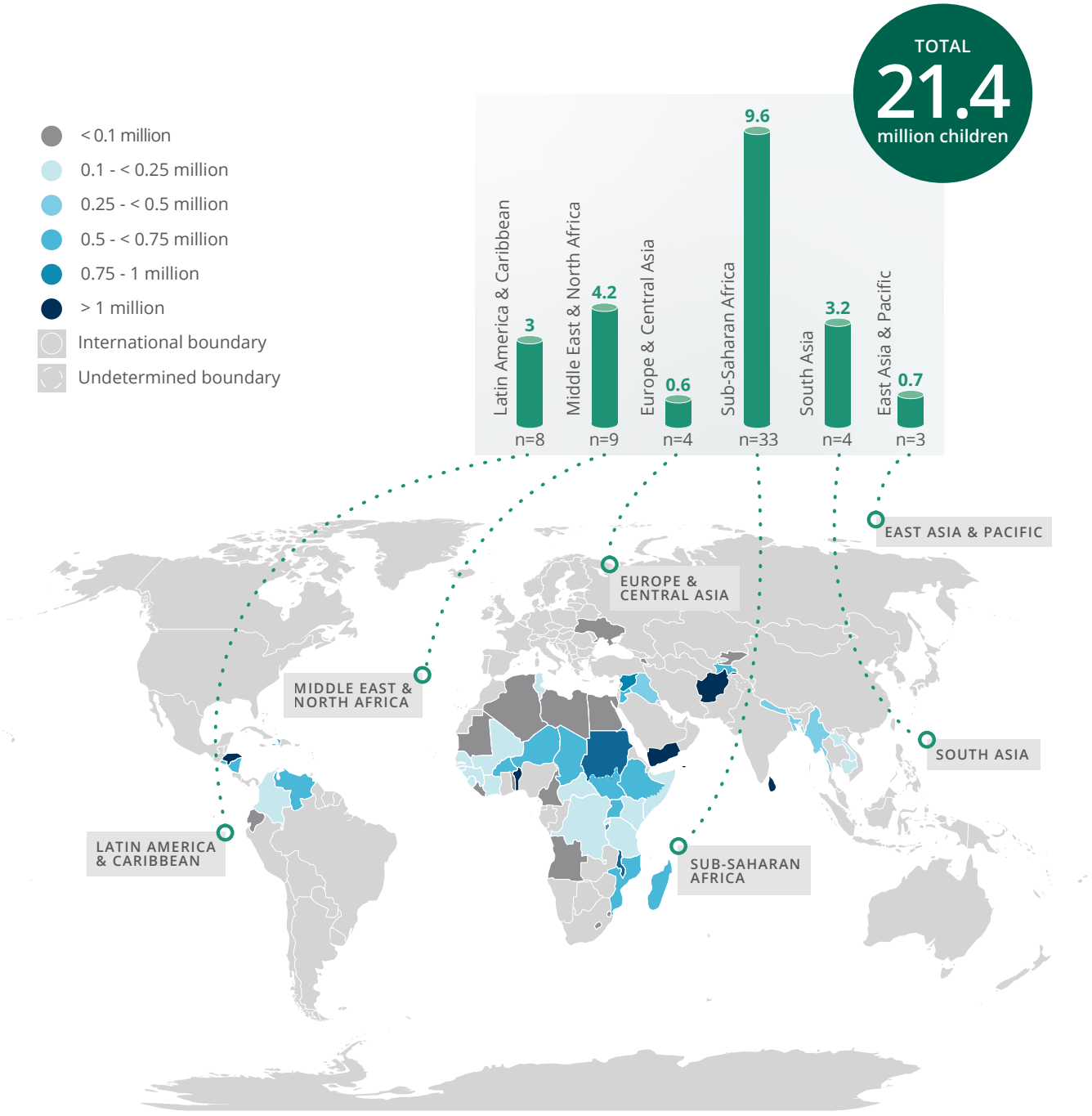
In terms of direct delivery of school meals, WFP has accelerated the transition of programmes in middle-income countries to full government ownership, while continuing to prioritize fragile and low-income settings with significant security and capacity constraints. In 2023, 15 million of the 21 million 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.

[2] 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.

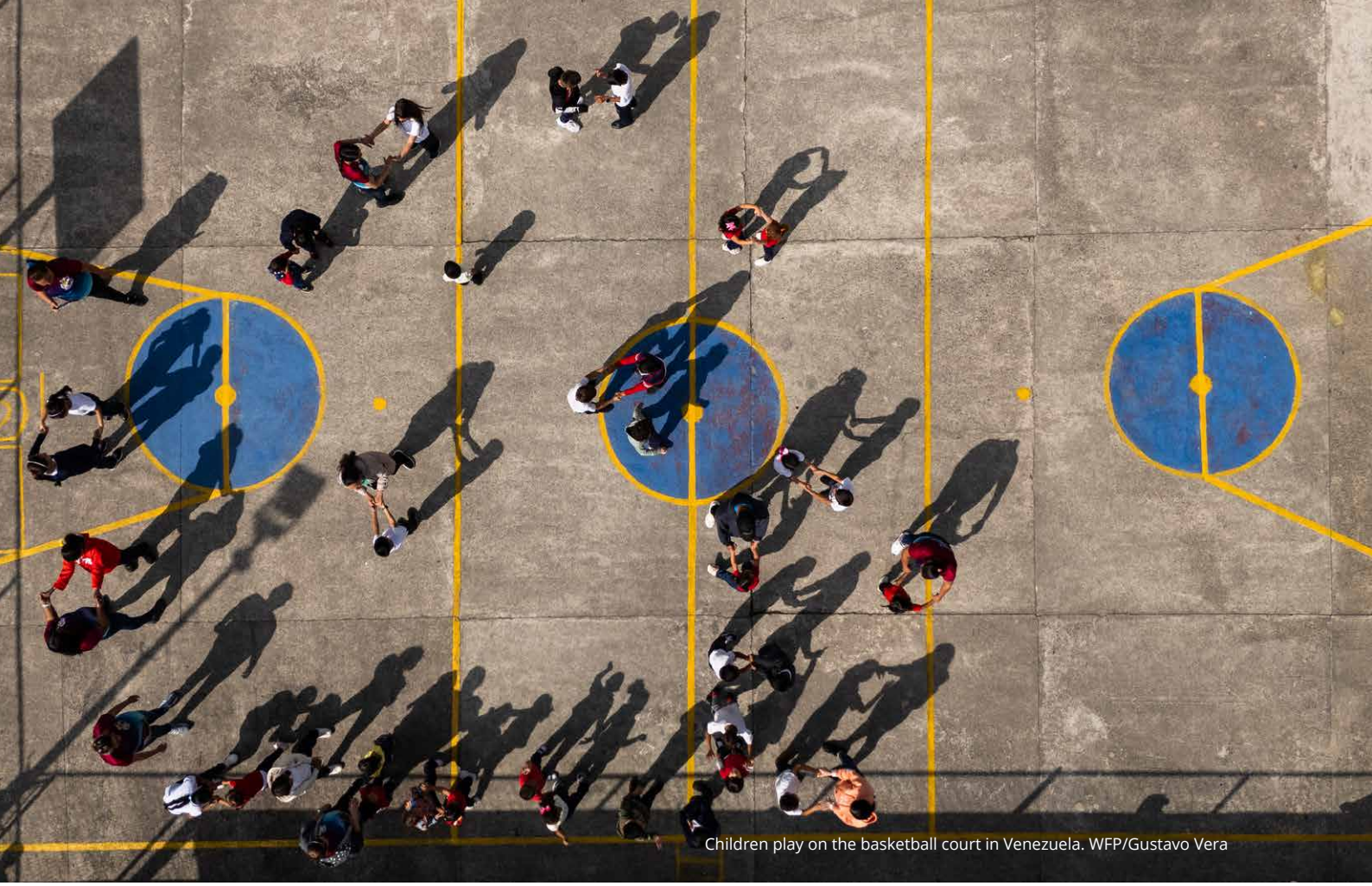
Map 3

Overview of WFP-implemented school meal programmes around the world in 2023[3]



Source: WFP (2023)

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



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

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.

The structure of the publication

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.

The full publication is available online at **www.wfp.org**

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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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