

## Case study

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### **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.

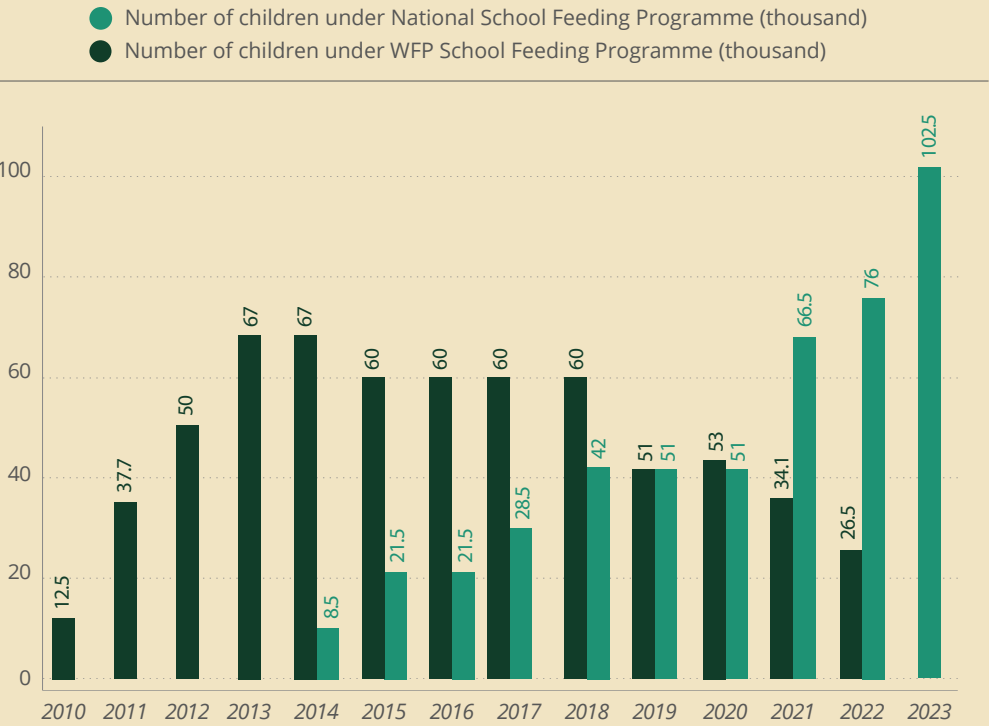
The transition is testament to the successful collaboration between WFP, the Armenian government and other partners, including the Russian Federation. This partnership ensured the programme's sustainability and enhanced its impact on education and student well-being. Following the transition, the government 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.

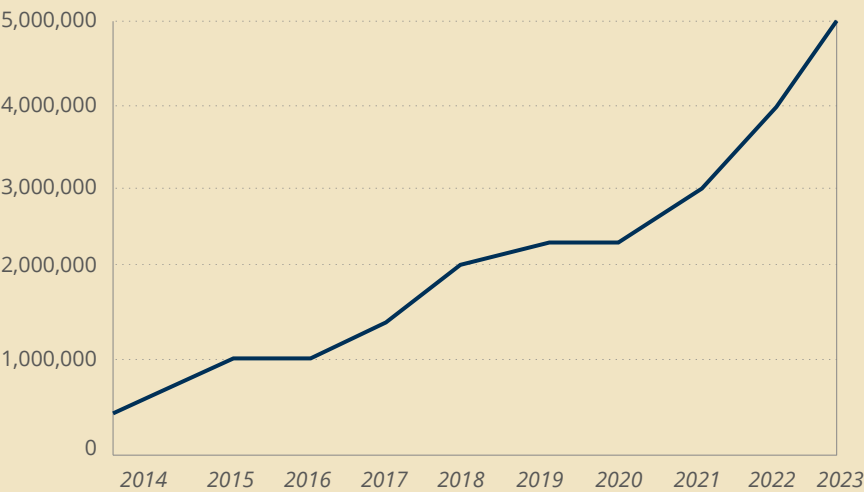
The government has established a model where funds generated by solar stations and sales from school agricultural projects are reinvested in school meals. Solar stations generate approximately 3,437,950 kWh of electricity annually, amounting to US\$387,000 each year. The programme also helped communities 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 1**  
Progression of school meal programme coverage in Armenia



**Figure 2**  
Government allocated budget for school year (180 meal days) in US\$



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### 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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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.

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### 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.<sup>1</sup> 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. Germany itself has had nutritional guidelines for school meals since 2008. In 2024, it adopted the "Good Food for Germany" strategy,<sup>2</sup> with a particular focus on children and young people.

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<sup>1</sup> [European Child Guarantee - European Commission](#)

<sup>2</sup> [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.

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### **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.

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## 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.

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### 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.

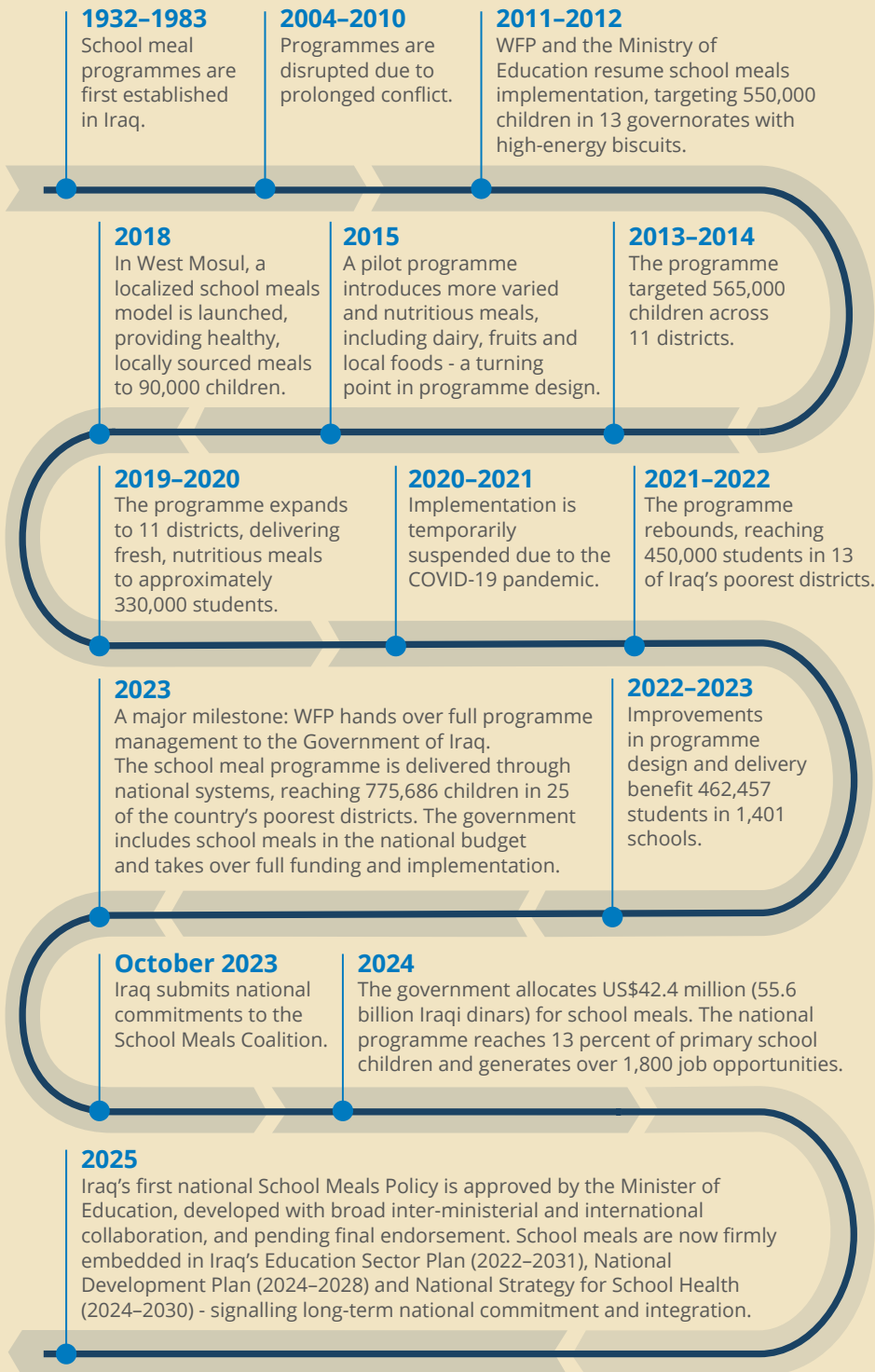
Since 2023, the government has fully implemented and funded the programme through a dedicated allocation in the national budget approved by the Iraqi Parliament for 2023–2025. In 2024, the government allocated 55.6 billion Iraqi dinars for school meals, with approximately US\$36.7 million (49 billion 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 3**  
History of school meals in Iraq



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### **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 adaptation.
- 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.

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### **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 multisectoral 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.

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### 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.

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### 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

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### **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.

# Case study

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## 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<sup>3</sup> and more than 3 million children are out of school.<sup>4</sup>

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;<sup>5</sup> 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.

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<sup>3</sup> [The 2023/2024 Human Development Report. Breaking the Gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Education | UNICEF Somalia](#)

<sup>5</sup> [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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.

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<sup>6</sup> [Government of Somalia forges partnerships to scale up school meals | School Meals Coalition](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Joint Outcome Statement: Donor conference advancing human capital through school meals in Somalia](#)

## Case study

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### 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,<sup>8</sup> 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.

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<sup>8</sup> "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.