



Paris, 18 – 19 October 2023
School Meals Coalition
First Global Summit

A row of five small, colorful icons: a green triangle, a blue circle, a yellow crescent moon, a red triangle, and a red horizontal bar.

School Meals Coalition First Global Summit Paris, 18 & 19 October 2023

Investing in Future Generations: human capital, sustainable food systems and climate change action through school meals

The School Meals Coalition was launched at the United Nations Food Systems Summit in September 2021, with the aim to provide every child with a healthy and nutritious school meal by 2030.

The coalition is co-chaired by Finland and France and supported by a Secretariat hosted by the World Food Programme). Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, 89 countries across the world together with 98 partners, including UN agencies, International Organizations, NGOs, think tanks and academia, came together through this Coalition to improve and restore school meals programmes as a transformational platform for food and education systems.

Two years after its launch, the Coalition has achieved significant success. It is proving to be an innovative platform for multilateral action and a formidable tool for catalyzing national actions. Thanks to this momentum, there has been a sea change in the level of political will around school meals. Global investment in these programs has increased by USD 5 billion (from USD 43 billion in 2020, to USD 48 billion in 2022), reaching 418 million children, compared to 388 million before the pandemic.¹

The why: Focusing on the next generation

The world is still facing unprecedented challenges that are disproportionately affecting children. Acute food insecurity is affecting 153 million children, almost half of all people affected by acute food insecurity.² At the same time, we are living through the most profound education crisis in modern history. About 70 percent of 10-year-olds in low-income countries cannot read or write a simple text.³ Part of that is because although we have been able to enroll more children in school, they are too sick or too hungry to learn. In low- and middle-income countries, about 73 million schoolchildren go to school feeling hungry.

All these challenges are connected and will have consequences for generations to come. If our food and education systems are simultaneously failing the young, then the way to a more sustainable future starts by addressing these systemic challenges.

Well-designed school meal programs are one of the most impactful and efficient interventions that benefit entire communities. By focusing on one policy lever – school meal and related public food procurement policies – governments can strategically leverage their power to make progress on several systemic issues.

Healthy school meals programs help to end child hunger and poverty and tackle multiple forms of malnutrition. They attract children to school and support children's learning, nutrition, health, and long-term well-being. School meals can promote gender equity by supporting girls and boys to attend and graduate from school. They provide opportunities to teach children how to eat better while learning about sustainable lifestyles and healthy diets. They enable a more holistic approach to child well-being through the integration of education, health, and social protection.

Planet-friendly school meals can also be a driver for food systems transformation and climate action. When linked to local procurement, these programmes can boost local economies, make agriculture more sustainable and support local smallholder farmers and businesses, many led by women. Making these meals more climate-friendly can help reduce national greenhouse gas emissions, including by greening

¹ WFP. 2022. State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022. Rome, World Food Programme.

² WFP. 2022. State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022. Rome, World Food Programme.

³ World Bank et al, 2022. The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update.

the food value chain and reducing food loss. School meals can also help promote regenerative practices and community resilience.

Globally, about USD 48 billion are invested annually in the purchase of food, creating a stable and predictable market. These programs are truly multisectoral investments to support future generations, strengthen food systems and build human capital. Every dollar invested in school meals yields 9 dollars back in social returns⁴: healthy and educated children are empowered to leave more productive and fulfilling lives.

The first global meeting of the School Meals Coalition will be about the potential for large scale, systemic transformation, by focusing on a strategic, practical, doable policy solution. It will also be about showcasing a new paradigm for multilateral and multisectoral cooperation through the School Meals Coalition.

Goals and expectations for the Global Summit

Under the high patronage of the President of the French Republic, the first School Meals Coalition Global Summit will take place in Paris on 18 and 19 October 2023. The summit presents an opportunity to showcase the mobilization and commitments of Coalition members in favor of school meals and to collectively set ambitious objectives for the years to come.

The summit will underscore that governments view school meal programmes as a powerful policy lever for transformation, extending beyond feeding children. School meals act as a gateway to a healthier and more inclusive and prosperous future. They yield multiple co-benefits and play a major role in addressing educational, cultural, economic and environmental challenges, while shaping healthy eating norms. The delivery of nutritious school meals for children serves as a safety net offering a strong lever to nourish the next generation, create jobs, drive economic growth, and foster longer-term development for countries across the world.

The concrete goals of the Paris summit are:

- Strong country commitments to expand and invest in school meals programs, making them available to all school children globally. The target of the Coalition is to reach about 720 million primary school age children worldwide – with a current reach of 418 million, there are many children who still do not have access to these programs.
- Regional bodies showcasing leadership and unveiling regional visions and concrete national commitments that have emerged from a series of regional meetings held during 2023.
- Several partner announcements to launch or kick start ambitious initiatives connected to food systems, climate and education.
- A clear policy action agenda aimed at improving the quality of the programs.
- School meals positioned in the international agenda to contribute to some of the most pressing challenges of our time and the change in paradigm of economic development and wellbeing, including peace, social cohesion, and stability. This event is connected and builds off other moments including the Food Systems Stocktaking event in Rome in July, the Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi in September, UNGA in New York, G20 Discussions. It will serve as a launching pad for the School Meal Coalition's engagement at COP28 and the Summit of the Future in 2024.

⁴ Verguet, S., Drake, L.J., Limasalle, P., Chakrabarti, A., Bundy, D.A.P. 2020. Comprehensive Economic Evaluation of School Feeding Program Costs and Benefits in 14 Low- and Middle-Income Countries. Economics Working Paper. Harvard School of Public Health.