



First global meeting of the School Meals Coalition – Paris, October 18-19

On 18 October 2023, the French President will open the first global meeting of the School Meals Coalition, organised in Paris over two days. This initiative, launched in 2021 by France and Finland, with the support of the World Food Programme, aims to ensure that by 2030, every child in the world has access to the school meals they need to learn and grow well.

As the world is battling multiple challenges such as rising hunger, unsustainable food systems and broken education systems affecting children most of all, the Summit will be an effort to work on a simple but powerful solution: ensuring that all children across the world receive a healthy and nutritious meal in school.

Of the 349 million people in the world today who are at high risk of food insecurity, 153 million are children or young people. School feeding has a central role to play in tackling this emergency, while in the longer term also acting as a formidable catalyst for achieving all the sustainable development goals.

School feeding contributes to children's access to health, water, and nutrition by providing healthy, nutritious food. It also strengthens access to education by prolonging schooling and enhancing learning. Finally, it promotes equality between girls and boys by avoiding any form of discrimination in access to the conditions needed to learn and grow well.

School meals also create jobs: in many countries, they represent the largest item of government expenditure on food, and can therefore encourage local agricultural development by offering producers visibility and stability in terms of demand. In 2022, 4 million jobs were created with these programmes, mostly for women.

Finally, school meals can show the way towards sustainable food systems, at a time when food systems account for more than a third of global greenhouse gas emissions and when the use of fossil fuels increases the cost of agricultural production.

The coalition is therefore promoting more sustainable farming methods, short supply chain models (from the farm to the canteen plate) and anti-waste reflexes, with the ambition of supporting them on a global scale.

To achieve this, the School Meals Coalition now brings together 90 Member States, as well as the European Union and the African Union. Inclusive by nature, the coalition also brings together nearly 100 partners from a wide range of backgrounds (scientific institutions, foundations, NGOs, UN agencies, municipalities, and many other actors). New members will be announced at the October Summit, along with new commitments from members. The conference will also be an opportunity to hear from people doing the fieldwork to implement school feeding on a daily basis, first and foremost the local



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authorities, some of which are members of the Cities for Nutrition network, and parliamentarian networks.

The Coalition also illustrates the success of multilateral partnerships in the face of common challenges. While the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools around the world have deprived many children of school meals, the Coalition has already fulfilled its first mission, which was to return to pre-pandemic levels. Today, 30 million more children have access to a school meal each day compared to 2019, i.e. 418 million children in total. Similarly, the share of public funding for school meals in low-income countries has risen from around 30% in 2020 to 45% in 2022, despite the budgetary difficulties faced by many countries as a result of multiple crises.

At a time when food insecurity around the world is worsening as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and when inflation is rising in many countries, everyone must act to ensure that all children have access to sufficient, healthy, quality food.