



School Meals Coalition

Nutrition, Health and Education for Every Child
Operational principles in 2024

The School Meals Coalition was launched at the United Nations Food Systems Summit in September 2021. Since then, more than 98 countries and 115 partners (including UN agencies, NGOs, think tanks and academic partners) from the global North and South have come together to improve and scale-up school meals programmes as a transformational platform for food, nutrition, and education systems.

The goal of the School Meals Coalition is that every child has the opportunity to receive a healthy, nutritious daily meal in school by 2030. To attain its goal, the coalition of partners will endeavor to achieve the following three objectives:

- Restore what we had (by 2023): Support all countries to re-establish effective school meal programmes and repair what was lost during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Reach those we missed (by 2030): Reach the most vulnerable, in low and lower middle-income countries, that were not being reached even before the pandemic.
- Improve our approach (by 2030): Improve the quality and efficiency of existing school meals programmes in all countries. Ensure that nutrition-sensitive approaches are linked to nutrition education and other health interventions.

The Coalition is based on a [concept note](#) that was agreed by member states in July of 2021, and which remains the main document of the initiative. This document sets out the operational principles of the Coalition for 2024 that have been endorsed by the Coalition’s Task Force. It reflects both the founding concept note, the findings and recommendations of the Coalition Review conducted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland in 2023¹, and the [Paris Statement](#) adopted at the occasion of the first School Meals Coalition Global Summit (18-19 October 2023), taking stock the achievements of the Coalition since its launch, welcoming new members, and recalling collective and country commitments made during the Summit.

The School Meals Coalition is an evolving global effort. To keep the structure flexible, these principles should be seen as the first building blocks in a process that allows for further shaping and refining by the Task Force on the basis of actual experience. Moving forward and as appropriate, the Task Force will review or issue revised operational principles as the Coalition moves forward.

The School Meals Coalition – what it is and what it is not

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

¹ Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. 2023. [Review of the process leading to the formation of the School Meals Coalition](#).



The Coalition is a voluntary, collaborative partnership framework that provides further opportunities for implementing agreed-upon mutual commitments. The Coalition aims to become a community which shares good practices, and optimizes cooperation, synergy, harmonization and complementarity, and evolves into a multi-actor network to help countries support an upscaling strategy.

The initiative is about governments and partners agreeing to work together under the same tent to improve the quality, sustainability and scale of national school meals programmes and complementary interventions. It is about pooling resources – best practices, experience, information and technical support. It will address implementation bottlenecks, support countries in addressing gaps in fiscal space and securing external financial resources, strengthen evidence for decision-making, provide opportunities for improved coordination and generate the political will and buy-in needed for change through advocacy.

Therefore, the focus of the School Meals Coalition is on supporting country-led efforts to strengthen implementation practices on the ground, taking into account the legacy of technical cooperation that has been disseminating good practices for the last 15 years.

The Coalition will not disburse resources for country actions and will not manage or direct funding for programmes. This is not a partnership based on fundraising. Unlike the Global Partnership on Education or Education Cannot Wait, this will not be a fund which channels resources to governments or partners for programmes. It may, nonetheless, emphasize where those funds are most need, as well as identifying how countries can have better access to them.

Significant amounts of financing will in fact be needed to improve and scale up the programmes, and the Coalition recognizes the need to increase external funding and innovative financial resources in various countries. The Coalition recognizes the sovereignty of Member States in leading on this, and domestic financing arrangements will be discussed, defined and handled at the country level by lead national institutions, with support from Coalition partners and the Coalition initiatives, including evidence and technical assistance from the Sustainable Financing Initiative, the Research Consortium and relevant technical partners. This support is additional to any current or future support from donors who may wish to support participating organizations with their own programmes in support of Coalition objectives, but this will be handled bilaterally between the partner and the donor.

Coalition principles

The following are the Coalition principles:

1. *Government-led, partner-supported*: The Coalition was formed by governments for governments, to move forward on a key policy priority. As such, representatives of countries that have signed the Declaration of Commitment, are the *members* of this Coalition and the center of gravity of this initiative. At the same time, progress will also require action by all stakeholders including international organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector. Organizations that have signed the Declaration of Support are considered *partners* of the Coalition. This distinction is important because governments will lead on their national commitments, while partners will work together to support them achieve their commitments.



2. *Country-level focus*: The Coalition is rooted in country-level action and is committed to providing lasting benefit in the lives of children and their families. At the national level the Coalition will require strong leadership by the government (translated into a clear vision and a well-articulated strategy) and ownership supported by political and sustainable financial commitments, a good governance structure and strong coordination among partners across sectors. Initiatives and partners at the global level will focus on supporting country-level action.
3. *Child-focused multisectoral action and partnerships*: it takes several sectors working together to help children fulfill their potential. Key among these sectors are education, health/nutrition, social protection and food systems. No one sector is fully and totally the owner of this agenda. This is a strength because several sectors can feel compelled to work together towards outcomes that mutually benefit them, but also a challenge because multisectoral coordination and alliances at the global and national levels are not easy. The Coalition will model what a true multisectoral approach could look like and will lean into the challenges and ambiguities that this entails with the intention of working together to develop actions, incentives and collaboration involving relevant sectors at the sub-national, national and global levels.
4. *Evidence-based action*. This coalition is based on research, especially over the last 15 years. It also draws on the findings of countries that have been successfully implementing school meals programmes, including in low and middle-income countries, as their experience may support finding similar solutions for other countries. Members and partners of the coalition are committed to continue to strengthen the evidence base for better decision making, drawing on an expanded network of research institutions from around the world, and will support the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, which is one of the initiatives under the Coalition umbrella.

The structure

Since early 2021, the Coalition has three main bodies and a secretariat that make up its nimble and flexible structure. The Coalition continues to favor a streamlined approach towards structure and is sustaining similar arrangements in 2024.





The Task Force

Led by the Coalition co-chairs, currently Brazil, Finland, France, on a rotational basis, and made up of focal points from each of the leading member countries, the Task Force is the decision-making body for the Coalition. It determines the overall strategic direction of the Coalition, sets yearly priorities, provides guidance and leadership to the work of the Secretariat and the initiatives, and leads on political advocacy and positioning.

The Task Force will continue to be composed of member country representatives and has been minimally reviewed since the launch of the Coalition. At the invitation of the co-chairs, it includes countries that have demonstrated significant commitment to the Coalition including through financial resources to sustain the coordination of the Coalition and/or its initiatives, political support at the highest level (Head of State or Ministerial), support to outreach and advocacy activities, and commitments of time and effort to engage in hands-on direction of the Coalition. Current members of the Task Force are: African Union, Brazil, Finland, France, Guatemala, Honduras, Japan, Kenya, Iceland, Rwanda, Senegal, Sweden, and USA..

The Task Force meets at the Ministerial level every second year. So far one meeting took place in Helsinki in October 2022. It is envisioned that in October 2024, the ministerial meeting will take place in Kenya.

The Task Force will continue to meet regularly through designated country representatives. If the focal point for a given country is the Permanent Representative in Rome, an alternate will be identified from the lead technical ministry in charge of school meals and school health and nutrition from that country. The minutes of Task Force meetings will be shared with Coalition members for information.

The Working Group

This is the larger and fully inclusive forum that encompasses all the member countries of the Coalition (in other words, all countries that have signed the Declaration of Commitment). Also co-chaired by Finland, France and Brazil, this group is primarily a broad forum for information sharing, dissemination of best practices and country experience, establishment and mobilization of further partnerships and alliances between countries and with other partners, and sharing of expertise and institutional support.

The members of the Coalition meet every second year at the Ministerial level through the School Meals Coalition Global Summits. The first Global Summit was organized in France in 2023. It is envisioned that in 2025, the second global summit will take place in Brazil.

The Working Group will continue to meet regularly through designated country representatives. If the focal point for a given country is the Permanent Representative in Rome, an alternate will be identified from the lead technical ministry in charge of school meals and school health and nutrition from that country. Participation in these meetings will provide members with information about what is going on with the Coalition at different levels including progress with each of the initiatives (see below). The Working Group provides a forum to share country-level updates and success stories, and request and provide mutual support and learn from what other countries are doing.



Members of the Coalition are invited to develop national commitments, which spell out how they will contribute to achieve the goals of the coalition, both in their countries and at the global and regional levels. National commitments are public and will be published in the Coalition website (see below, section on Country level action).

The Partners Group

Chaired by WFP, this is the forum that encompasses all partner organizations of the Coalition (in other words, all organizations that have signed the Declaration of Support). Similar to the working group, this is a broad forum for information sharing, mainly at the technical level.

The Partners Group will continue to meet regularly through designated organizational focal points. Participation in these meetings will provide members with information about what is going on with the Coalition at different levels including progress with each of the initiatives (see below); it is also a forum to provide country-level updates and success stories, and request and provide mutual support and learn from what other members are doing.

The Secretariat

The overall organization and management of the Coalition is done by WFP through augmented capacity in its School Meals & Social Protection in headquarters in Rome, which serves as the coordinating body for the Coalition, with strategic guidance of the Task Force.

The Secretariat provides backstopping and support to member states and stakeholders that are participating in the Coalition, maintains and develops relationships, and keeps members informed and connected. This includes outreach to new members; organizing periodic meetings and events; keeping stakeholders informed, empowered and motivated; and helping to connect initiatives and avoid duplication of efforts.

The Secretariat manages the website, social media channels and newsletters of the Coalition, ensuring that all members have access to key documents, calendars of events and social media assets for effective advocacy. It also provides support to the Coalition's initiatives, most of them led by other partners, including coordination services, funding support, facilitating regular reporting to Task Force members, connecting to country members and partners, and support in joint advocacy efforts.

The Secretariat, in close collaboration with the WFP network, also provides initial support to regional initiatives and networks, in close collaboration with regional bodies and organizations, and existing regional partnerships, with a focus on regional peer-to-peer learning and support.



The Initiatives

The Coalition focuses on encouraging country action and providing input to help governments address challenges to grow and improve programmes at the country level. To support governments tackle some of these challenges, the Member Countries are currently supported by four initiatives: the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition; the Sustainable Financing Initiative; the Data and Monitoring Initiative and; Cities Feeding the Future. Each initiative provides a unique set of services and support for governments.

The Initiatives are invited to report periodically to the task force and receive guidance from its members. The work of the different initiatives does not necessarily reflect the view of the members of the Coalition. Each initiative provides periodic updates to member countries through working group meetings, connects with partners through the partners group and other mechanisms and contributes to the Coalition newsletter and other newsfeeds as appropriate.

The following are the four initiatives of the Coalition:

— *Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition*: Launched in May 2021, it is coordinating a 10-year research agenda to promote independent research to inform evidence-based decision-making on school health and nutrition. Led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Research Consortium coordinates the independent, global efforts of networks of academia, think tanks and research partners. The Consortium will continue to make efforts to ensure representation and equitable partnerships across regions and country income levels, fostering a new cohort of researchers focused on this area. It generates evidence on the design, cost, implementation, and impact of school health and nutrition programmes, makes the case for investment, and provides policymakers of Coalition countries with policy and programmatic advice on good practice in school health and nutrition. Evidence is disseminated widely to support country decision making and improve the scale and quality of programmes. Website for more info <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/research/centres-projects-groups/research-consortium-for-schoolhealth-and-nutrition>.

— *Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition*: launched in July 2022, it is led by the Education Development Center and explores different ways to support countries with more sustainable sources of financing for school meal programmes; this includes stepping up domestic financing and also finding ways of increasing and making funding from donors more efficient and effective.

— *Data and Monitoring Initiative*: led by WFP, it is coordinating efforts by countries and partners to develop and sustain a global school meals database which will track and monitor Coalition actions and accomplishments. This is a work in progress and is currently being developed in partnership with Dubai Cares, the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, the Global Child Nutrition Foundation, USDA, UNICEF, FAO, WHO and regional groups, including the African Union and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA/NEPAD).



— *Cities Feeding the Future*: Launched in October 2023, it is led by the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. Its goal is to share good practices and knowledge from selected successful cities around the world, to help other cities among the Coalition countries replicate these models.

Regional and country level action

Regional peer-to-peer networks have been established or are being established in most regions, led by member countries of the Coalition. These include the Regional Network in East Africa; the ECOWAS network in West Africa; and the Latin American School Feeding Network. The Asia region has also announced the intention to create a regional network in 2024. Moving forward, the Coalition will continue to welcome and support, as appropriate, these regional, country-led efforts to establish mechanisms of collaboration, experience sharing and exchange.

Each member country has been asked to determine its national commitments vis a vis the Coalition, to define them in a participatory and multisectoral way at the country level, and to ensure that they are measurable and timebound and are aligned to the goals of the Coalition. The commitments are an opportunity for countries to articulate their national priorities, which in turn can signal to partners where potential support is needed and should be focused. Commitments can also include how the country will participate or engage in any of the initiatives of the Coalition. So far, 38 countries issued their commitments.² The Coalition Secretariat and partners are available to support the commitment-building process.³

Governments are encouraged to ensure alignment with the existing Food System National Pathways and with their convenors. They are also encouraged to request support from the UN system through existing channels, including agencies such as WFP, UNICEF, FAO, UNESCO and WHO, which have agreed to support this process. Governments could also request support from other stakeholders who have signed up to support the Coalition at the regional and country level, including the four Coalition Initiatives, regional blocks, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, research institutions and others, ideally forming a national level coalition to support action.

Connections with sectoral coordination bodies

The Food Systems Summit Coordination Hub has been set up and is hosted by FAO with interagency staff. The Hub supports countries with dialogues, strengthened outcomes, linking the dialogues with existing country plans and UN Sustainable Development Framework and global efforts, including Coalitions launched at the UN Food Systems Summit such as the School Meals Coalition.

² Armenia, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Chile, China, Dominican Republic, DRC, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Iraq, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Luxembourg, Mexico, Mongolia, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, USA and Zambia

³ The School Meals Coalition has also issued a *Guidance on preparing and submitting a national commitment*, available at: https://schoolmealscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/EN_Guidance_Commitment.pdf



On the education side, the new SDG4 governance structure includes a High-Level Steering Committee, a Sherpa Group, an Inter-agency Secretariat hosted by UNESCO and four functional areas, which are focused on evidence-based policy formulation, monitoring progress, and financing. The Coalition Secretariat is exploring options of connecting with these structures and connecting the initiatives of the Coalition with the leaders of the functional areas.

Information sharing mechanisms and contacts for further information

The initiatives will have progress webinars and updates to members throughout the year, as appropriate.

The Secretariat maintains the website of the Coalition, which will be re-designed in 2024 with inputs from member countries and partners, as well as an X account. A social media toolkit and a calendar of events will be available on the Coalition website.

The Coalition newsletter will continue to be sent out the first week of every month. The editorial group is led by WFP. Members and partners that would like to provide inputs for the newsletter can be sent to global.smcsecretariat@wfp.org by the 20th of every month for consideration.

Key contacts

Many partners are participating in the Coalition and its various pieces. Below is the list of key contacts who can connect interested parties with the relevant partner or focal point.

Coalition Co-chairs:

- Carla Carneiro, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the Rome based UN Agencies, carla.carneiro@itamaraty.gov.br
- Céline Jurgensen, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France to the Rome based UN Agencies, celine.jurgensen@diplomatie.gouv.fr
- Tanja Grén, Permanent Representative of Finland to the Rome based UN Agencies, Tanja.Gren@gov.fi

Secretariat:

- Carmen Burbano, Director, School Based Programmes, WFP, carmen.burbano@wfp.org
- Maria Jose Rojas, Head of Partnership and Advocacy, School Based Programmes, WFP, Lead of the School Meals Coalition Secretariat, WFP, mariajose.rojas@wfp.org
- Emilie Sidaner, School Meals Coalition Secretariat Coordinator, emilie.sidaner@wfp.org
- Constanza Peña Ugarte, Partnerships Officer, constanza.penaugarte@wfp.org
- Main email address of the Secretariat: global.smcsecretariat@wfp.org

Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition:

- Donald Bundy, Professor of Epidemiology and Development, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Donald.Bundy@lshtm.ac.uk

Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition:

- Liesbet Steer, President and CEO, Education Development Center and Director, Sustainable Financing Initiative, LSteer@edc.org



Data and Monitoring Initiative:

- Niamh O'Grady, Head of Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, Research and Learning, School Based Programmes, WFP, niamh.ogradey@wfp.org

Cities Feeding the Future Initiative:

- Filippo Gavazzeni, Head of the MUFPP Secretariat & knowledge sharing programmes, Food Policy Department, City of Milan. Filippo.Gavazzeni@comune.milano.it

Website: <https://schoolmealscoalition.org/>

X/Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SchoolMeals>

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/SchoolMealsCoalition>