



The School Meals Coalition: status and what's next

Side event on the margins of the second regular session of the Executive Board
Wednesday, 20 November, 13:30–14:30
In person with video streaming

Context

The School Meals Coalition was launched at the Food Systems Summit in 2021. Since then, it has only grown in numbers and impact. Its membership has increased from 45 countries and 1 regional body in 2021 to more than 100 countries and 3 regional bodies in September 2024.

The main goal that unites all members and partners, is the aim to ensure all children have access to healthy nutritious meals in school by 2030. To achieve this, countries have set out to restore access to school meals programmes lost during the pandemic; help low-income countries reach the most vulnerable; and promote safe, nutritious and sustainably produced food, and diverse and balanced diets, linking to local and seasonal production where appropriate.

- 418 million children now benefit from school meals worldwide. Up from 388 million in 2020.
- USD 5 billion additional domestic funds were invested in school meals. From USD 43 billion in 2020 to USD 48 billion in 2022.
- 15 percent increase of domestic budget allocation by low-income countries, despite severe tightening of fiscal space.
- 4 million direct jobs were created, most of them benefitting women.

The Coalition was catalytic in this achievement, by advocating with governments to prioritize and invest in these programmes as schools re-opened. The great political momentum created is reflected in the main achievements of these past two years.

Impressive progress has been made at the country level, with 49 countries issuing national commitments to enhance school meal programmes. The Coalition has played a key role leading to notable policy commitments aimed at expanding and enhancing programme quality.

New regional dynamics have been established, through at least five regional events that took place this past year, in which regional school meal networks were created, countries shared best practices, and supported each other's commitments. Meetings and discussions were held in East, West and South Africa, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Continuous support to governments to address their challenges has been provided by the initiatives of the School Meals Coalition – *the Research Consortium; the Sustainable Financing Initiative; the Data & Monitoring Initiative; and the Cities Feeding the Future initiative*- that have provided more than 50 services, which include carrying out country case studies, developing financing plans and strategies, analyses on school meal programmes and food systems, and carrying out value for money studies.

Partners are stepping up their support. In just two years, the Coalition has transformed the landscape, promoting a new era of multilateralism. By September 2024, 132 partners have joined the Coalition – from 44 in 2021 – including new groups of stakeholders like development banks and international financial institutions, groups of municipalities, as well as groups of parliamentarians.

What is coming next? The last years have been filled with positive change, but we are working against a combination of crises, which call for even greater action. The major challenge now is that the recovery has been least effective in low-income countries, remaining 4 percent below pre-pandemic levels. There is also an immense potential to make programmes more nutritious, sustainable, and local.

Objectives

This session aims to highlight key successes and provide an update on the School Meals Coalition's ongoing efforts to ensure every child has access to healthy, nutritious meals by 2030.

- Brief member states on the School Meals Coalition: offer a clear overview of the Coalition's mission, structure and its achievements in the first years and explain to Member States how they can engage with it and what is in it for them.
- Share the outcomes of the Ministerial Task Force Meeting that took place in Nairobi on 29 October, including the priorities set for 2025–2026, driving future coalition efforts.
- Brief Member States on the new School Meals Impact Accelerator initiative, discussed and endorsed by the Task Force of the coalition.
- Highlight Kenya's newly launched operational plan and national school meals coalition.
- Provide a preview of upcoming events and opportunities: outline the coalition's future events and opportunities for further engagement and collaboration.

Agenda

13:30 **Welcome and opening remarks**

Brief introduction, setting the stage for the discussion on the impact of the School Meals Coalition.

13:35 **Dynamic round table: Celebrating the School Meals Coalition's successes and the establishment of the School Meals Impact Accelerator initiative to be launched in 2025**

A panel of Member States dive into key achievements, success stories, and what is next for the Coalition. Moderated for a lively, interactive conversation.

14:10 **Open forum: Q&A and reflections**

Audience opportunity to engage with the panel and share thoughts.

14:25 **Closing thoughts and future outlook**

Summarizing the highlights, key takeaways, and a look ahead as the event wraps up.

14:30 **Event concludes**