

Guidance on preparing and submitting a national commitment



How to join us



Thank you for joining the School Meals Coalition. This note provides governments with guidance on how to develop a national commitment. As a reminder, here are the steps that governments take to join the Coalition:

Step 1

Sign the Declaration of Commitment. With this you become a member of the Coalition.



Step 2

Develop a national commitment. This details your country's commitments and actions towards achieving the goals of the Coalition.

These two steps don't need to be taken at the same time. The Coalition encourages governments to take time to develop their national commitments in a consultative way, meaning it is perfectly acceptable to first submit the Declaration of Commitment and then work towards developing a national commitment.

The goals and objectives of the Coalition

The Coalition is member state-driven and commitment-based effort. To drive concerted action, particularly at the country-level, and reach the collective goal and objectives of the Coalition, member states are encouraged to develop ambitious, actionable national commitments.

Goal

Every child has the opportunity to receive a healthy, nutritious daily meal in school by 2030.

Objectives

Restore what we had (by 2023)

Support all countries to reestablish effective school meal programmes and repair what was lost during the 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. Increase the efficiency of programs to enable low and lower middle-income countries to become more self-reliant.

Improve our approach (by 2030)

Improve the quality and efficiency of existing school meal programmes in all countries by facilitating a healthy food environment in schools and promoting safe, nutritious and sustainably produced food, and diverse and balanced diets, linking to local and seasonal production where appropriate.



What kind of commitments is the Coalition looking for?

The Coalition is looking for ambitious but realistic commitments from governments, given the critical importance of their leadership in prioritizing school meal programmes. Commitments can demonstrate how a country could introduce/prioritize school feeding programmes or will improve and scale its current programming or support other governments in doing so. The Coalition encourages governments to articulate how they will or would like to work with other partners from academia, international organizations, civil society and the private sector to implement their commitments to help guide those partners on how they can best engage and support member states within the Coalition.

Please note: these commitments do not refer to financial commitments towards the Coalition or any of its initiatives. The membership to the Coalition is not subject to financial contributions.

The Coalition asks governments to present commitments in the following six categories:

- 1 Policy commitments:** If a country does not have a school feeding policy or a law, we encourage governments to make this one of the commitments. Commitments in this category could ensure that national school meal programmes are prioritized in national and sectoral plans, policies, strategies, laws, or other legal frameworks. School feeding policies also serve to ring fence funding especially when the country has a decentralized domestic budget allocation system.
- 2 Financing commitments:** These can include (1) national commitments to have a dedicated budget line for the national school feeding programme (governments are also encouraged to include a specific target to increase domestic allocation for the programme, with a clear time frame) or (2) international commitments toward supporting programmes in other countries that do not have the necessary resources, which may include national budget/treasury investments in school feeding and direction of donor resources, loans and grants from multilateral funds, IFIs, and private sector contributions towards school feeding.
- 3 Institutional commitments:** This could include strengthening institutional capacities and coordination skills to lead and deliver school meal programmes at all levels, such as commitments to establish standards and plans, for example nutrition guidance, as well as multisectoral working committees or working groups.
- 4 Programme design and coverage commitments:** Commitments can include increasing the quality of national programmes according to the national and local context, needs, and gaps, and/or the reach of these programmes. For instance, we encourage governments to think through some of the following commitments: specify the percentage of food to be purchased locally as part of a national law/policy from small holder farmers; linking school feeding to at least four other multisectoral interventions; making school menus more nutritious and adopting national nutrition standards or guidelines to promote dietary diversity/the inclusion of fresh foods and/or the inclusion multi-fortified, biofortified foods; set a target in percentage of schools with climate smart sustainable energy sources for cooking; supporting local communities (especially women) through home-grown school feeding programmes; strengthening programme monitoring, making data more accurate and available; and fostering technical cooperation, including South-South triangular cooperation.

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Evidence and data generation commitments: Producing case studies and data on school health and nutrition to make national programmes more efficient and share results with other countries. Building the evidence base, enhancing the scope, quantity and quality of available data and improving evidence and data accessibility and usability are critically important elements to inform policy and decision-making. Commitments on evidence and data generation can be around country efforts to work to generate evidence and improve data collection, analysis and dissemination and ensure its integration into policy and decision-making processes. In addition, we encourage countries to commit to report back on their progress to the Coalition every two years, when appropriate.

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Advocacy and partnerships commitments: High-level advocacy that aims to elevate the profile of multiple benefits of school meals at national, regional, and global levels is crucial in advancing the coalitional goal and objectives. Such advocacy efforts can include government efforts to ensuring school meals are included and prioritized on the agendas of relevant global fora such as the G20, the Global Education Summit, the Nutrition for Growth Summit, amongst others. The Coalition will also benefit from efforts that build support among a broad array of national stakeholders (including parliamentarians, private sector, communities and NGO partners) and that raise awareness about school meals in national and regional conferences and meetings. We encourage members to identify a national champion to represent the country in Coalition ministerial meetings every two years.

Please note that countries will not necessarily need to put forward commitments in each of the six commitment categories. See **Annex 1** for illustrative examples of specific commitments governments might consider putting forward.


In developing national commitments, it is also crucial to recognize the multisectoral nature of school meals programs, especially considering the global challenges facing member states, including the food, education, and climate crises. In making commitments that address sectoral or cross-sectoral policy domains such as food system transformation, climate action, education, nutrition, and social protection, governments can spotlight these priorities during important global and regional moments of the Coalition. Therefore, this guidance note emphasizes the importance of taking a holistic and multisectoral approach when developing commitments, as this will help ensure that school meals programmes can contribute to addressing the complex challenges we face today.



What is the process for submitting a commitment?

The Coalition requests a succinct one- or two-page document (see **Annex 2** for a sample) that states the commitment your government is making toward achieving the goals of the Coalition. We would like to emphasize that an official endorsement of national commitments will carry significant weight if it comes from the highest level of political leadership. Therefore, we highly encourage member states to seek official endorsement at the head of state or government level or, at the very least, ministerial level.

We suggest the commitment include a general statement of support for the Coalition, alignment with its goals and a rationale for supporting it, and an enumeration of the commitments, actions or investments that will be made in support of the Coalition's goals. We encourage you to use the above categories as guidance to develop the commitments.



How do I craft a commitment?

Commitments should be crafted in alignment with the context in which each government operates and in line with the challenges that must be overcome to scale and improve programming, or to support other governments in doing so.

For governments that have already facilitated a national consultation on school meals or recently conducted consultations to assess challenges and identify gaps related to different pillars of the national school feeding programme and follow-up action plans (SABER), a commitment might formalize the roadmap that has already been established in a consultative process. If a school feeding consultation or roundtable is being planned for the near future, the commitment-making process is the perfect framework to drive that activity and shape its outcome. UN agencies, NGO partners or other stakeholders are encouraged to consider how they can engage in these processes and in dialogues with governments about how their work can support eventual commitments. In formulating commitments, governments are encouraged to review existing national school meal policy and programs and consult with other stakeholders.

Meeting the global targets set up by the Coalition requires converting commitments into clear actions which governments can easily track. We encourage governments and partners to think through their commitments using the SMART approach:

- **Specific**
Each commitment should identify a specific action and indicate who is responsible for achieving it.
- **Measurable**
Pledges should include an indicator to enable measuring progress and achievement of the commitment. Quantifiable indicators are easier to monitor and could indicate the baseline where relevant and possible.
- **Achievable**
Commitments should be consistent with the level of progress achieved in the past. They should be as ambitious as possible, but mindful of the limits of what can be delivered in a realistic timeframe.
- **Relevant**
Pledges should reflect national priorities related to capacity, quality, coverage, financing and monitoring of school meals programmes and challenges relevant to the context (at regional, national, or global levels) and be based on levels of progress achieved in the past.
- **Time-Bound**
Commitments should have a realistic timeframe for achievement and specify key milestones to be achieved within that time. Ideally, commitments should cover more than one calendar or fiscal year and can be tracked and reported against.

Suggested actions to develop strong national commitments – from what has been learned so far:

- **Gather evidence:**
 - > Start by reviewing the recommendations from the last SABER exercise your country conducted, if one exists. If the exercise is over five years old, consider using existing relevant reviews and/or conducting a new one to understand where current gaps are and how to bridge them.
 - > Consider holding policy dialogues to identify gaps, action plans, and commitments.
- **Align your national commitment to other documents setting actions in this area:**
 - > If school feeding and school health and nutrition are already included in national sector plans, such as the education, health, nutrition, agriculture, social protection and/or national development plan, consider including relevant actions in your national commitments.
 - > If your country submitted a national pathway to the Food Systems Summit, map out actions related to school feeding and school health and nutrition and incorporate these to your national commitment.
 - > If your country submitted a position document to the Transforming Education Summit, consider including relevant actions in your national commitments.
- **Secure broad buy-in within the Government and spearhead multistakeholder and multisectoral dialogues:**
 - > Consider holding government consultations with different ministries (e.g., Education, Finance, Social Protection, Agriculture etc.) to ensure that national commitments are inclusive and reflect collective national priorities. Countries where relevant ministries have agreed to national commitments in a participatory way, are moving forward steadily to meet their goals. Governments may wish to consider applying a participatory approach to their commitment-making process that ensures meaningful engagement of stakeholders across sectors, including subnational actors.



What initiatives are available to support Member States?

The Coalition initiatives are set up to support governments in reaching their commitments and will support countries as needed. The initiatives include:

- A “Research Consortium of School Health & Nutrition” launched in May 2021 and led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, to provide the scientific evidence for which programmatic actions to prioritize, based on their impact and value for money, and to establish a 10-year research agenda.
- A “Sustainable Financing Initiative” launched in July 2022 and founded by the Global Education Forum, to focus on the low fiscal capacity of low-income countries for school meals and school health as the most important challenge to the scale-up and transition to national school meals programmes.
- A “Data & Monitoring Initiative” launched in March 2022 and led by the World Food Programme (WFP). The initiative will include a global school meals database, in partnership with Dubai Cares, the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition and regional groups like the African Union and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA/NEPAD), to be used to track and monitor Coalition accomplishments.

We encourage governments to also reach out to the different stakeholders of the Coalition, who can support you in the development and implementation of commitments.

The School Meals Coalition Secretariat also stands ready to support governments in developing their national commitments. For more information on country examples of national commitments, please contact global.smcsecretariat@wfp.org.



How is this document going to be used and monitored by the Coalition?

Your commitment will be made public in various forms. It will be posted on the Coalition's website and be used in communications materials showcasing members and contributions to the Coalition. This will provide those interested in supporting the Coalition with the opportunity to look at existing commitments from governments, both as illustrative examples of what can be done and, if appropriate, to support a specific commitment. The Coalition encourages, as much as possible, governments to implement commitments in a collaborative and multi-stakeholder manner, in line with the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The School Meals Coalition Secretariat will monitor the progress and achievement of the commitments through the biennial State of School Feeding report. The latest State of School Feeding Report was issued in March 2023, and its next iteration will be published in 2025. Countries that can demonstrate progress on their commitments will be highlighted in the publication. Other opportunities to take stock of the achievements will be the annual achievement documents of the Coalition as well as key events, such as the biennial ministerial meeting.

The first School Meals Coalition Global Ministerial meeting will be held in October 2023 in Paris, France. The Paris Meeting will serve as a transformative moment to spark renewed momentum and catalyze country leadership towards fulfilling national commitments to achieve the collective goal of ensuring that school meals are available to all school children globally. This includes establishing a clear policy action agenda to improve the quality of the programs and their benefits.

When and to whom to send the commitment document?

Please send your commitment document to global.smcsecretariat@wfp.org with the following information:

1. Country
2. Country flag/emblem
3. Contact name
4. Contact information (email address)



Illustrative Examples of National Commitments



For all governments

Governments and their domestic school meals programmes are at the heart of this effort. Commitments in this regard should highlight the category of the commitment, the target and, when possible, a deadline. Examples might include:

Policy commitments

- Developing or revisiting a national policy or law on nutritious school meals to include guidance on healthier school environments or nutritional standards.

Example Target:

- (1) *Develop a national school meals policy by 202X to ensure that every child in the country has access to a nutritious meal in school by 202X.*
- (2) *Pass a law on school meals by 202X improving nutritional standards for children.*

- Embedding school meals into other relevant national, sectoral or institutional policies (e.g. national development plans, food fortification-related policies)

Example Target:

- (1) *Feature school meals in the national development plan, strategy or framework.*
- (2) *Include school meals in policies relating to food fortification.*

Financing commitments

- Establishing a budget line or increasing the existing budgetary allocation to finance school meals from domestic resources.

Example Target:

- (1) *Establish a sustainable budget line for the school meal program and increase the yearly allocation to USD X million in the next two years.*
- (2) *Ensure that the national budget allocated to school feeding will increase progressively in the next five years to achieve 100% by 202X.*

Institutional commitments

- Establishing or strengthening institutional arrangements for school meals, including strengthening multisectoral coordination.

Example Target:

- (1) *Establish a School Feeding Coordination Unit with relevant staffing in the Ministry of Education by 202X to lead on strategic and coordination matters for the national school feeding programme.*

Programme design and coverage commitments

- Launching national school feeding programmes or increasing the coverage of the national school meals programme to a specific number of children over a specified number of years.

Example Target:

- (1) *Reach 75% schoolchildren by 202X and 100% schoolchildren by 202X.*
- (2) *Reach X million schoolchildren by 202X and 5 million schoolchildren by 202X.*
- (3) *Launch a national school feeding programme by 202X reaching X million schoolchildren.*

- Piloting new or innovative approaches including the connection to local food production, introducing new digital technologies for nutrition education or monitoring, introduction of food fortification.

Example Target:

- (1) Approve national nutrition guidelines/standards to ensure healthy school meal standards by 202X, with the inclusion of X% fresh foods.
- (2) Roll out a new home-grown school feeding programme by 202X using X% of locally sourced food from small holder farmers.

- Provide school meals in conjunction with at least four other health and nutrition interventions including, for example, nutrition education, school based agricultural projects, water sanitation, dental testing, deworming, health and vaccination days, infrastructure rehabilitation and use of clean energy, etc.

Example Target:

- (1) Improve and sustain a vaccination and deworming campaign starting from 202X for X% of students in the country.
- (2) Improve the infrastructure of all rural schools to allow for strengthened WASH facilities.

- Leverage school meal programmes to achieve national climate outcomes by enhancing cooking technologies in school through the use of clean, climate smart sustainable energy solutions.

Example Target:

- (1) Introducing new cooking solutions in X% of schools with sustainable energy sources by 202X.

Evidence and data generation commitments

- Be an active part of knowledge sharing on best practices in school feeding, participating in experience sharing activities with other countries (study visits, case studies, technical assistance).

Example Target:

- (1) Develop a country case study for school feeding by 202X to be shared with the regional and global community. Examples may include value for money studies, nutrient gap studies.
- (2) Report back to the Coalition on a bi-yearly basis with country data to be showcased in Ministerial meetings of the Coalition and in the State of School Feeding Worldwide publication.

Advocacy and partnership commitments

- Advocating for more funding to be allocated to school meals by major donors, international financial institutions and multi-donor funds.

Example Target:

- (1) Position school meals within the Economic Community in 202X as a smart investment for crisis recovery and human capital development.

- Joining in advocacy efforts globally, regionally or at the national level.

Example Target:

- (1) Mobilize political leadership towards school feeding by hosting one regional meeting on school health and nutrition by 202X.
- (2) The Minister of Planning, Finance /Education/Agriculture/etc. will represent the country in Coalition ministerial meetings and advocate for healthy nutritious meals in the region.

For development partners

For development partners financing commitments could in addition be directed to support:

- Increased contributions to low-income countries for school meals.

Example Target:

(1) Increase financing operations supporting school meals in three countries experiencing food and climate crises by 202X.

- Support for specific countries or regions to reach their objectives and commitments.

Example Target:

(1) Increase financing toward school feeding operations in two countries to reach X million of the most vulnerable children.

- Support for the coordination of the Coalition.

Example Target:

(1) Allocate funds to the Coalition Secretariat for its activities in 202X and beyond.

(2) Provide the secondment of an expert to support one of the Coalition's initiatives in government ministries as appropriate.





Sample National Commitment Document



Sample National Commitment Document

The Government of [insert country] expresses its strong support for school meal programmes as a policy lever to drive and strengthen human capital, social and economic growth and sustainable food systems.

We are convinced that this programme is a systemic solution that helps combat child hunger and poverty; supports child nutrition, learning, long-term well-being and health equity; strengthens food systems and local economies; and promotes gender equality by keeping girls in school.

We believe school meals programmes are about much more than food in school. They help to improve and diversify children's diets, teach children how to eat better and support national and local markets and food systems by using locally grown food where possible, improving opportunities for smallholder farmers and local catering businesses, many led by women.

At a time in which world leaders are having to tackle several crises as once, such as the education, the food and the climate crisis, school meals should be positioned as a central, cross-cutting intervention that will contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future.

[Country] as a proud member of the School Meals Coalition announces the following commitments towards its goals:

Commitment	Category¹	Target	Deadline

¹ The categories to be included in this column are the ones listed earlier in this document on page 2:

- (1) policy commitments;
- (2) financing commitments;
- (3) institutional commitments;
- (4) programme design and coverage commitments;
- (5) evidence and data generation commitments;
- (6) advocacy and partnerships commitments.