

Statement, 18.10.2022

School Meals Coalition Leaders' Declaration

Fuelling Future Generations – Investing in School Meals to Tackle the Global Food and Education Crises

We, the Leaders and Ministers of Member States of the School Meals Coalition Taskforce met in Helsinki, Finland, on 18 October 2022, to take coordinated and collective action to help countries scale-up school meal programmes to mitigate the impacts that the global food and education crises are having on future generations.

We express grave concern about the threat of the growing food crisis following already worsening food insecurity due to a convergence of factors, including poor crop conditions, ongoing conflicts, and pandemic lockdowns, inflation, and now fuelled by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The food crisis is threatening to reverse decades-long gains in the nutrition, health, well-being, and education of all children, especially those who have or have not returned to school following the intermittent closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is disrupting their lives and threatening their future.

We are fully alarmed that per the World Food Programme (WFP) estimates, of the 345 million acutely food insecure people worldwide, about 153 million are children under 18 years of age, with this figure increasing by 23 million since the start of the global food crisis.

We note with regret that according to Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition estimates, even before the pandemic, about 73 million school-aged children living in extreme poverty and hunger across sixty low and lower-middle-income countries were not receiving school meals. We are determined to reach these 73 million vulnerable children most in need of healthy, nutritious school meals.

We acknowledge that the annual cost of reaching the 73 million children in need of school meals and complementary health interventions, as estimated by the Research Consortium, US\$ 5.8 billion, with about half that amount for low-income countries for which they will need international support. The remaining amounts should be filled by middle-income countries for their programmes from domestic resources.

We welcome the insights provided in *The Statement* from the Research Consortium and urge further action to translate those insights into policy.

We also welcome the Call to Action from members of the School Meals Coalition Stakeholder Group.

We recognize that school meals programmes, the world's largest social safety net, are an effective policy response to the education and food crises as they provide countries with a transformative tool to mitigate learning losses and address the immediate health, nutrition and well-being of children, and to keep girls, who are disproportionately impacted by the multi-factorial crises the world is experiencing, in school.

We are strongly convinced that there can be no transformation for an inclusive, equitable and quality education without a credible and meaningful response to the global food crisis.

We, therefore, call on members of the international community and all relevant school meals stakeholders to take the below effective and resolute measures to safeguard and bolster school meals programmes amidst the global food and

education crises.

We strongly encourage governments and/or local authorities to expand national and/or local revenue to finance integrated school meals programmes, among other things, by exploring innovative financing options.

We request national and/or local governments to prioritize strengthening school feeding spending efficiency and equity, including developing robust targeting criteria that factor in need, as well as inequalities and multiple forms of discrimination, to reach girls and the most vulnerable and marginalized children. We also encourage countries to enhance the nutritional value of school meals and explore innovations and innovative ways to organize school meals.

We encourage development partners to increase aid spending on school meals programmes by US\$ 1 billion, which is equivalent to 0.6% of current development assistance flows, as development partners have an important role to play in supporting low and lower-middle-income countries' transition to sustainable, country-owned and financed school meals programmes.

We also encourage international financial institutions and multilateral development banks to set a collective lending target of US\$ 750 million in concessional financing, and an equivalent amount in non-concessional financing channelled towards school meal programmes.

We ask international financial institutions and multilateral development banks to launch initiatives which mobilize concessional, non-concessional and innovative financing for school meal programmes, considering high and self-reinforcing rates of return of cross-sectoral home-grown school feeding investment.

We call upon member states and other stakeholders to strengthen their monitoring, evaluation and learning systems for school meals programmes and support the inclusion of a school meals indicator in the Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education framework revision. In addition, we call on WFP, as the lead of the Data Monitoring Initiative, in collaboration with the Global Child Nutrition Foundation and many other partners, to establish a global database and a global survey for better global reporting and tracking.

We welcome the announcement that the Global Ministerial Meeting of the full Coalition will take place in Paris in 2023. We resolve to work together to oversee its preparations and reconvene then to assess progress on the above proposed actions.

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