



# ACT NOW: UNIVERSAL SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL

On Monday 1st September 2025, young people from 12 countries and 5 different youth networks came together in a virtual dialogue on school meals ahead of the 2nd Global Summit of the School Meals Coalition.

Below are their demands to all those shaping school meals programmes.

## No child should ever go hungry at school.

School meals are a **fundamental right**. They are not an expense, but an investment in health, education, and development. Every child deserves access to nutritious food.

We, as young people, call on all stakeholders - parents, teachers, grassroots workers, civil society, policymakers, and governments - to act. **School meals are everyone's concern.**


**Meals go beyond nutrition.** They keep children in school, fuel learning, and open the door to opportunity. When combined with academic support, school meals can unlock full access to education for every child.

### *Our recommendations for action:*

#### 1. Universal and Equitable Access

- **Every child should have access to school meals**, regardless of their financial background, and these should be cost-free or included in existing school fees.
- **School meals must be universal**, with governments committed to delivering them for all children as an integral part of education.
- These meals must be culturally appropriate for children with diverse backgrounds, and accommodate children with special dietary needs, allergies, and medical restrictions.

#### 2. Nutritious Meals

- School meals must go beyond just calories - they should provide **the balanced nutrition children need** to grow and develop (proteins, vitamins, minerals).
  - School meals should use **local and fresh ingredients**, not processed foods, supporting healthy diets and local farmers.
  - Meals should meet **food safety standards**, with trained staff preparing healthy meals.
  - School meals programmes should act as **a platform for nutrition education**, educating students, and sharing information with families and the wider community on the value of food and how to make nutritious food choices.
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## 3. Water, Sanitation, and Health

- To make school meals truly equitable, they must be **integrated with access to clean water and sanitation**.
- Governments must guarantee reliable access to clean water for cooking, school gardens, and safe eating – recognising that without adequate water, there is no food.

## 4. The Importance of Community and Youth Voice

- Governments, schools, and NGOs should **actively involve students, parents, and teachers** in shaping school meals – from menu design to delivery and monitoring.
- Schools and governments (local and national) should establish student-led school meals monitoring groups and **ensure young people have a seat at the table**.

## 5. Sustainable, Long-term Programmes

- Governments must invest further in school meals, **securing reliable and sustainable funding** to protect these programmes.
- Governments should develop **comprehensive national school meals plans** with clear goals, budgets, and defined roles for all stakeholders, including governments, schools, and community organisations. These plans must include coalition engagement and a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure accountability.
- School meals programmes must **strengthen local food systems** by partnering with farmers, building eco-friendly supply chains that boost local economies.
- School meals programmes must prioritise **minimising food waste** throughout their operations, ensuring that resources are used efficiently.
- School meals programmes should **promote environmental sustainability** by integrating renewable agriculture technologies, such as agrivoltaics, into their supply chains. They should also **advance renewable energy** in the agriculture sector to create future opportunities for communities."

We call on all decision-makers: hear our voices and take action.

In a world where hunger is rising, universal, sustainable and equitable school meals are not optional – **they are our right**.

