

SCHOOL FEEDING IN TIMES OF COVID-19

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENTS DO?

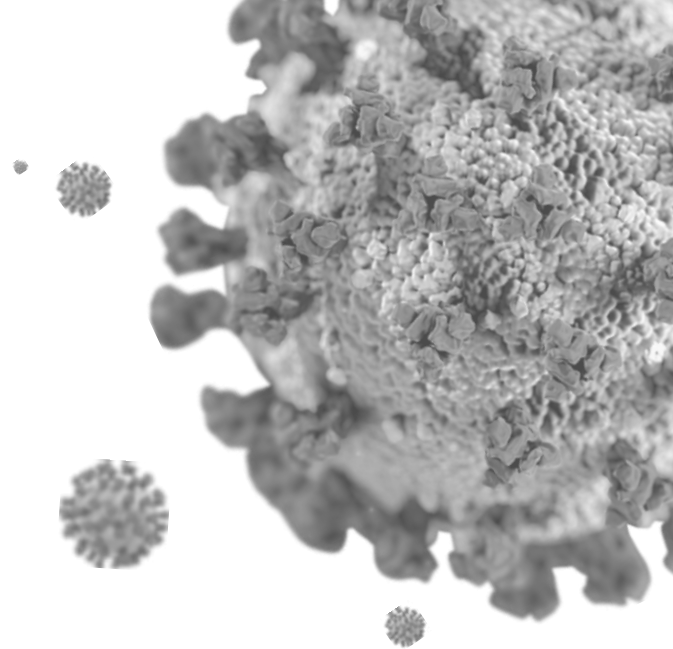
Last updated: April 17th, 2020

With the advance of COVID-19 worldwide, thousands of schools have suspended their activities and around 368 million children no longer have access to school feeding¹. The provision of meals in schools represents a stable and predictable supply of food to children, contributing to improve nutrition, health, and academic performance. In social vulnerability situations, school feeding constitutes an indirect income transfer to families, which can reach up to 10% of the household budget². With classes suspended in almost 200 countries¹, vulnerable families are doubly affected by the lack of access to food in the school environment, in combination with the income reduction caused by the decline in economic activity.

Due to the importance of school feeding to guarantee access to food and healthy nutrition for children, finding suitable alternatives for each country context is key. In that sense, many governments are restructuring their programmes to ensure the continuity of school meals initiatives. The alterations revise the benefits allocated per child/family and allow a shift from on-site eating modalities to the distribution of food baskets or direct cash transfers. In many countries, the government relies on support from WFP to ensure that the food distribution follows international health and hygiene standards: adequate distance between people, hand washing and using protective gear.

This document aims to share some of these experiences to inform decision-makers about different models that can be considered by countries to meet their population's food and nutrition needs, which are exacerbated under the current pandemic context. The information provided here was gathered from WFP Country Offices, government focal points in Brazil and online media sources.

It is important to state that this is not a prescriptive document, but one to be used for informative and advocacy purposes. The measures listed here are examples of how national and sub-national governments, along with WFP, have been adapting their regular school feeding programmes, while coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.





Food baskets

- In **Chile**, the government requested support from 35 thousand food handlers to reorganise school feeding products in individual baskets to be distributed to students. Specific measures were also adopted to guarantee people's safety, such as prioritising distributions in outdoor spaces, a minimum distancing of two meters between the beneficiaries, and avoiding contact between the task team and the people receiving the baskets.³
- In **Cambodia**, the government and the WFP have reorganised school feeding provision and are now offering rice baskets to students. Under that scheme, students have received a benefit of 10 kg of rice each – an amount equivalent to one month's consumption – with a maximum limit of 20 kg per family. The baskets will be distributed to families of scholarship students or beneficiaries of IDPoor, a poverty eradication programme.⁴
- With schools closed for at least a month, the government of **Lao** will distribute a food basket containing one month's worth of food needs to students. If schools remain closed for a longer period, the government is studying the option of adopting the take-home rations modality.⁵
- The Government of **Costa Rica** has introduced the distribution of food baskets with 9 perishable and non-perishable items that should last for 2-3 weeks (rice, beans, chick-peas, lentils, salt, oil, tuna, pasta, and milk).⁶
- In order to keep the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) in operation, the Government of **Brazil** has authorized food distribution to students' families in the form of food kits. According to a new law sanctioned in early April, PNAE's money will continue to be transferred from the federal government to states and municipalities for food procurement. The food must then be immediately distributed to parents or legal guardians of students. Food Kits must follow the legal provisions regarding nutritional and sanitary quality, respect regional food habits and local culture, and should preferably be composed of fresh and minimally processed foods.⁷

Take-Home Rations

- In **Madagascar**, with a stock of 880 tons of food already purchased and stored for school feeding, the government has decided to adopt the distribution of take-home rations to students' families. In order to raise community awareness of the new way school feeding operates, the government mobilised officers from the Ministry of Education who work at the local level.⁸

- **Malawi** is another country where take-home rations are being considered. Thus, food would be distributed to families in schools following international sanitary and distancing recommendations, with the support of WFP for handwashing facilities and protective wear.⁹

- In **Niger**, regular school feeding should also be replaced by THR, particularly for foods with a close expiration date. Complementary activities that involve food production and do not require gathering people – such as maintenance of school gardens (for consumption, not for educational purposes) – should be maintained.¹⁰

Cash transfers

- Parallel to the federal government measures, the states of **Brazil** have also announced actions to support families and children that depend on school feeding. The **State Government of São Paulo**, for example, will transfer R\$ 55 (USD 10) per month to 700,000 students from the state education network, as an alternative to their school meals. The payments will be made to families of students who live in extreme poverty, identified by cross-checking data from the Single Registry - a Brazilian government database for the income transfer programme Bolsa Família - with data from the State Secretariat of Education. The **Federal District** has also started a cash transfer scheme through magnetic cards for the families of 22 thousand children aged from 1 to 5.⁷

Distribution of ready meals

- The **United States** Department of Agriculture (USDA) is encouraging American states to replace regular school feeding with delivery of ready meals to students at specific distribution points. At the same time, Congress also proposed bills that aim to facilitate access to food for families through other social programmes in the area of food and nutrition.¹¹

- In **Finland**, schools under distance learning in most municipalities of the country (46.1%) are distributing hot or cold meals five times a week for students to take home. Other municipalities provide in natura food in weekly baskets (22.2%), distribute food vouchers (9.9%) or rely on cash transfers (5.6%).¹²



The intent of this document is to be regularly updated. Therefore, if you have an interesting country experience that you believe could be included, please, contact us.

¹ <https://cdn.wfp.org/2020/school-feeding-map/index.html>

² <https://www.wfp.org/school-meals>

³ <https://www.mineduc.cl/se-inicia-entrega-de-1-millon-600-mil-canastas-de-alimentacion-escolar/>

⁴ WFP CO Cambodia

⁵ WFP CO Lao

⁶ https://www.mep.go.cr/sites/default/files/page/adjuntos/protocolo-general-distribucion-alimentos-centros-educativos-publicos-suspension-lecciones-raiz-emerg_0.pdf

⁷ Information validated by the Brazilian Government.

⁸ WFP CO Madagascar

⁹ WFP CO Malawi

¹⁰ WFP CO Niger

¹¹ WFP CO USA

¹² Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)