



WORKING PAPER

# School Meals Case Study: **Latvia**

Prepared by the Research Consortium for School Health and  
Nutrition, an initiative of the School Meals Coalition

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# Historical background

Latvia is a small country located in Northern Europe along the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. It borders Estonia to the north, Lithuania to the south, Russia to the east, and Belarus to the southeast. Latvia's population has declined to around 1.8 million, and its area is 64,600 square kilometers. The capital city, Riga, stands as the largest and serves as a significant cultural and economic hub within the region. As of July 1, 2021, Latvia is composed of 43 municipalities, including 36 district municipalities and seven city municipalities.

Latvia initially gained independence in 1918 and prospered rapidly. It was then occupied after World War II and was only able to regain its independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today, Latvia operates as a democratic republic and has been a member of both the European Union and NATO since 2004. The state language is Latvian, a unique and ancient language belonging to the Baltic branch of the Indo-European language family. It is one of two surviving Baltic languages. Although Latvian is the dominant language, English is widely spoken, especially in cities and among the younger population, and Russian is also widely spoken. The official currency of Latvia is the euro (EUR, €), adopted in 2014, superseding the former currency, the Latvian lats. Latvia's integration into the Eurozone signifies its participation in a common currency system with numerous other European Union member states. Latvia has a well-developed service sector, a growing technology sector, and significant forestry and food production. Latvian culture, rich in folklore, music, and natural traditions, has been passed down from generation to generation. Reverence for nature, the changing seasons, and ancestral customs are essential to Latvian identity. One of the most significant cultural events is the Latvian Song and Dance Festival, which brings together thousands of performers and people from across the country in a grand celebration of national heritage. Latvia is known for its diverse natural landscapes, including forests, lakes, rivers, and a long coastline with sandy beaches. About half of the country's territory is covered by forests, making it one of the greenest countries in Europe.

## Country profile

### Population and economics

*Table 1: Key data regarding the Latvian population and economic sectors*

Total population (2023) at beginning of year <sup>1</sup>	Total number of population aged 5 to 19 <sup>2</sup>	Total number of population employed in agricultural sector <sup>3</sup>	Gross domestic product per capita (2023) <sup>4</sup>
1 883 008	291 002 (15.45 % of total)	265 500 (14.09 % of total)	21 444 EUR

### Education

The education system consists of preschool, general (primary and secondary), and higher education. Children typically begin preschool between the ages of 1.5 and 7, with mandatory preparation starting at age 5. Primary education is compulsory until the age of 15, but obtaining an education remains mandatory until age 18. General education spans 12 years:

<sup>1</sup>[https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP\\_PUB/START\\_POP\\_IR\\_IRS/IRS010/table/tableViewLayout1](https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START_POP_IR_IRS/IRS010/table/tableViewLayout1)

<sup>2</sup>ibid

<sup>3</sup>[https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP\\_OD/OSP\\_OD\\_skait\\_apsek\\_darb\\_laukskait/LSK01-V02.px/table/tableViewLayout1/](https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_OD/OSP_OD_skait_apsek_darb_laukskait/LSK01-V02.px/table/tableViewLayout1/)

<sup>4</sup>[https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP\\_PUB/START\\_VEK\\_IK\\_IKP/IKP010/table/tableViewLayout1/](https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START_VEK_IK_IKP/IKP010/table/tableViewLayout1/)

nine years of mandatory primary education (ages 7-15) and three years of secondary education (ages 16-18).

Primary education programs are delivered in years 1-9, with partial programs available in pre-primary schools. Educational institutions (both municipal and private) offer programs in various formats: full-time, part-time, and distance learning. In some cases, children are homeschooled or self-taught with family assistance. General secondary education is obtained in secondary, high, evening (double-shift), and part-time schools.

A school year in general education institutions lasts 35 weeks. Schools offer four tracks in general secondary education for students in years 10-12: general education; mathematics, science, and technology; humanities and social sciences; and professional studies.

*Table 2: Number of schoolchildren at different levels and involved in school meals in the school year 2023/2024<sup>5</sup>*

Total number of students	Total number of schools	Average class size	Number of children involved in school meals	Percentage of children eligible for free school meals
309 003 94 618 in pre-primary education (aged 5/6 – 414524) 214 385 in years 1-12 (incl. those in years 10-12 – 30371)	1 253 (621 in pre-primary education and 632 in general education)	28 students per class. Average number of students per school: 336	214 385	85 143 i.e. 39.7% (years 1-4). Some local governments provide funding for meals for students in other grade levels.

## Food security, nutrition and health

- Food insecurity: on average 9.4% of the population was reported moderately or severely food insecure over the period 2019-2021.<sup>6</sup>
- Stunting children aged from 5 to 19 years: no specific data available.
- Micronutrient deficiency from 5 to 19 years: no specific data available.
- Thinness in children aged from 7 to 9 years: 12.0%.<sup>7</sup>
- Overweight in children aged from 7 to 9 years: 13.9%.<sup>8</sup>
- Obesity in children aged from 7 to 9 years: 10.1%.<sup>8</sup>

# Design and implementation of school meal programmes

## Description

All children enrolled in preschool and general education in municipal schools are included in the school meals program. Municipalities organize school catering either centrally, with one or a few procurements for all schools, decentrally, with separate procurements for each school or group of schools, or via a mixed method. Both food product procurements and

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.viis.gov.lv/>

<sup>6</sup> SOFI (2022) <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0639en/cc0639en.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.spkc.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/specialisti-iepazistinaja-ar-bernu-antropometrisko-parametru-un-skolu-vides-petijuma-rezultatiem>

catering service procurements are carried out by municipalities. Each municipality and school develops its own menu, adhering to specific nutritional standards.

The Ministry of Health provides recommendations for healthy nutrition, establishes nutrition standards, and drafts food-related regulations. Concurrently, the Ministry of Education and Science oversees the operation of educational institutions, ensuring that students receive appropriate nutrition in alignment with educational program requirements. It also manages the allocation of state subsidies, calculating funding amounts and distribution.

School catering operates under a co-financing model, where parents partially or fully cover catering costs for preschool children and students in grades 5–12. In many municipalities, discounts on school meals are granted to families with multiple children and those experiencing financial difficulties.

Since 2017, the application of Green Public Procurement (GPP) criteria in food supply and catering service procurements for schools has been mandatory in Latvia. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development is responsible for establishing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating GPP procedures.

The Ministry of Agriculture oversees food quality and safety, drafting legislation regulating food circulation, including school catering. The Food and Veterinary Service monitors food safety in educational institutions, ensuring compliance with hygiene and quality standards.

In addition to the centralized school meals program, Latvia implements the EU support program for the supply of fruit, vegetables, and milk to schools. This program allows preschool and grades 1–9 students to receive free fresh fruit, vegetables, and milk portions three times a week. Conditions of the program mandate various educational and informational activities each year to educate children and their families about agriculture, production methods, regional products, healthy nutrition, and food waste reduction.

Both the centralized school meals program and the complementary voluntary EU school fruit, vegetable, and milk program bolster the local economy, support short food supply chains, environmental protection, and biodiversity preservation. They also enhance students' academic performance, social equity, and inclusion.

## Objectives

The current School Catering Programme (SCP) integrates sustainability, including social equity, nutrition and hygiene quality standards as well as GPP criteria as a mandatory requirement for food quality, environmentally friendly delivery and seasonal foods. The SCP's goal is to provide tasty, warm and healthy lunches for all students, using local food as much as possible. Based on this, the main objectives in the field of school meals are as follows:

- improve the current school meal funding model because since 2020 part of the school meal funding for schoolchildren in years 1-4 has been allocated from the municipal budget, which reduced the range of years having free lunches;
- evaluate GPP quality criteria with the aim of increasing the proportion of local (organic food, National Food Quality Scheme - NFQS) food in school meals;
- design sample menus, giving preference to seasonal and local food to ensure diversity (including a vegetarian meal), and provide all schoolchildren with an equivalent meal opportunity;
- improve the connection of educational content with issues of sustainable and healthy nutrition;
- enhance the procurement and control of food and catering services.

## Coverage

The SCP involves all schoolchildren in pre-school education and general education (primary and secondary) in municipal schools. It is centralised, and it is binding on the local governments of 7 state cities and 36 regional municipalities across the country. According to Section 4 of the Local Government Law, one of the functions of municipalities is the education of residents, including giving an opportunity to obtain mandatory education and ensuring the availability of pre-school education, primary education, secondary education, vocational education, interest-related education and adult education.<sup>8</sup>

However, in accordance with Cabinet Regulation No. 610, educational institutions provide students with an opportunity to have hot food at least once a day. As at 01/09/2023, according to the Ministry of Interior, 1253 educational institutions were registered in Latvia, incl. 632 providing general education.

## Targeting

The eligibility criteria for social status could vary from municipality to municipality; however, most often, the following categories of children from a general education school have the right to receive free lunches:

- those diagnosed with a disability;
- those from families that have been granted the status of a poor or low-income family;
- those under guardianship; from a family that raises four or more children under the age of 18, or with group I or II disabilities who have not reached the age of 24; if one of the children attends a day-shift general or vocational education institution – until the day the s/he reaches the age of 24;
- based on a decision by the Social Service;
- in individual cases if the social pedagogue and class teacher identify that the social conditions for the child prevent him/her from receiving paid meals.

In the case of a general education school, a child from a family that raises three children under the age of 18 or with disabilities group I or II who have not reached the age of 24 has the right to receive a 100% subsidy (free lunch); however, then one of the children attends a day-shift general or vocational education institution – until the day the s/he reaches 24 years of age. Funding for the school meal programme is derived from three main sources (Table 3).

*Table 3: Distribution of funds for the school meal programme by source of finance*

Preschool education programme	General education programmes	
Children up to 7 years old	years 1-4	years 5-12
<b>0-50%</b> municipal funding <b>0-100%</b> parent funds*	<b>50%</b> national funding <b>50%</b> municipal funding	<b>50-100%</b> municipal funding for children with a social status <b>0-100%</b> municipal funding for the other children. The part that is not funded by the municipality is covered by parents.

\* Parent funds might change, depending on the financial possibilities of the municipality

## Meal type

Each municipality and school may devise their own menus in accordance with Cabinet Regulation No. 172. Annex 2 of this regulation specifies that meals for students in years 1-4 should be served based on a complex lunch menu, while students in years 5-12 have the

<sup>8</sup> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/336956-pasvaldibu-likums>

option of either a complex lunch menu or an optional menu. The head of the educational institution is responsible for overseeing the catering and making decisions about the menu in collaboration with parents and the catering service provider. Regardless of whether a complex or optional menu is offered, all nutritional requirements must be adhered to for both types of menus.<sup>9</sup>

The menu is designed every week to ensure that:

- the lunch menu includes a main course and soup or a main course and dessert (e.g. cut fresh or processed fruit or berries with yoghurt or other products, blended fruit or berry shakes with or without milk or milk, baked fruit etc.) or soup and dessert;
- the dishes included in the weekly menu are not repeated (except for side dishes and bread);
- no more than 2.5 g of sugar per 100 ml of the product is added to the drink served with food, and it is also recommended to offer drinking water.<sup>11</sup>

The food is most often prepared in the school canteen. However, if the food is not prepared in the school canteen, the catering company must meet the food delivery requirements, maintaining a safe temperature of the food, which is not lower than 60-63°C and protecting the food from any contamination. Cabinet Regulation No. 610 Hygiene Requirements for Educational Institutions Implementing General Primary Education, General Secondary Education, Professional Basic Education, Vocational Education or Professional Secondary Education Programmes prescribe the requirements for a catering facility: dining rooms, auxiliary rooms and kitchen, as well as the proper storage of kitchen utensils and equipment.<sup>10</sup>

## Nutritional norms

Cabinet Regulation No. 172. also stipulates that a daily school menu must include:

- foods rich in complex carbohydrates such as potato, cereal flakes (oats, rye, barley etc.), groats (barley, buckwheat, rice, pearl barley etc.), pasta and other cereal products, i.e., whole grain products;
- vegetables, fruits or berries, including fresh ones (e.g., vegetable salad, vegetable soup, fresh fruit);
- protein-rich foods such as lean meat (carcass muscle), fish (fillet), eggs, cottage cheese, cheese, pulses);
- milk or dairy or sour milk products (e.g. kefir, yoghurt without additives, buttermilk).

*Table 4: Nutritional Requirements for Lunch for School-Age and Preschool-Age Children (Cabinet Regulation No. 172)*

Educatees	Energy (kcal)	Protein (g)	Fat (g)	Carbohydrates (g)
<b>schoolchildren in years 1-2</b>	720–800	18–30	24–36	81–120
<b>schoolchildren in years 3-6</b>	860–1170	22–44	29–52	97–176
<b>schoolchildren in years 1-4</b>	490–750	12–28	16–29	55–113
<b>schoolchildren in years 5-9, students in years 1-3</b>	700–960	18–36	23–37	79–144
<b>secondary school students in years 10-12, students in years 1-3</b>	800–980	20–37	27–38	90–147

<sup>9</sup><https://likumi.lv/ta/id/245300-noteikumi-par-uztura-normam-izglitiba-iestazu-izglitojamiem-socialas-aprupes-un-socialas-rehabilitacijas-instituciju>

<sup>10</sup><https://likumi.lv/ta/id/69952-higienas-prasibas-izglitiba-iestadem-kas-isteno-visparejas-pamatizglitiba-visparejas-videjas-izglitiba-profesionalas>

The main indicator of a school menu is compliance with the principles of healthy nutrition, which catering companies that provide this service to educational institutions also try to strictly adhere to. Cabinet Regulation No. 172 sets specific nutritional requirements, which restrict the consumption of both unhealthy foods, salt and flavour enhancers in school meals. This regulation also prescribes that the amount of added salt in a finished food shall not exceed 0.4 g per 100 g of the food. The total amount of added salt in foods served at educational institutions that provide dormitory or boarding school services and social correctional educational institutions shall not exceed 5 g per day. The amount of added sugar in food shall not exceed 10 g for lunch; for boarding schools it is 25 g per day (excluding the amount of sugar added to flour confectionery cooked by oneself).

## Food procurement

On 1 July 2017, Cabinet Regulation No. 353 "Requirements for Green Public Procurement and the Procedure for the Application Thereof" was adopted. This regulation mandates the application of green public procurement (GPP) criteria for food and catering services within the public catering sector. Public catering services are procured by national and local government institutions in various ways: centralized, decentralized, and mixed. These institutions may procure both food products and catering services.

The GPP quality requirements are met by foods that possess the Green Spoon and Bordeaux Spoon labels, which fall under the National Food Quality Scheme (NFQS). Additionally, these requirements include foods produced through organic farming or integrated farming methods.

To promote the sale of environmentally friendly food, Cabinet Regulation No. 353 has established mandatory GPP requirements for organically produced food. Specifically, since January 1, 2022, at least 50% of milk and kefir procured must be produced using organic farming techniques. For cereal products, the requirement is 20%, and at least 45% of certain food categories must meet the National Food Quality Scheme (NFQS) standards, identified by the "spoon" label.<sup>11</sup> The criteria set by this Regulation aim to increase the proportion of local, especially organic, food procured through GPP procedures. However, the current involvement of local food producers in GPP remains insufficient.

This Regulation also stipulates the assignment of evaluation criteria points to products or groups of products with lower environmental impact, facilitating comparison, evaluation, and selection of the most economically advantageous tender. In cases where tenders are equivalent, regardless of the applied tender selection criterion, the procurement contract is awarded to the tender that includes a higher percentage of products with lower environmental impact, adhering to GPP requirements specified in legal acts, such as food quality schemes, and utilizing the shortest possible delivery distances or procuring seasonal products. Among all schools, 6.95% are private educational institutions, which are not necessarily obligated to apply GPP criteria when providing school meals.

## Legal framework and public policy evolution

Several Regulations offer a national framework to implement the School Catering Programme. A GPP policy has been designed for procuring food and catering services. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MoEPRD) is responsible for GPP policies. Based on the Public Procurement Law, the MoEPRD developed **Cabinet**

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<sup>11</sup> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291867-prasibas-zalajam-publikajam-iepirkumam-un-to-piemerosanas-kartiba>



**Regulation No. 353** Requirements for GPP and the Procedure for the Application Thereof (entered into force on 1 July 2017). The MoEPRD has also designed guidelines for the application of GPP to food and catering services<sup>12</sup>, as well as provides green procurement training and technical support for those making procurements. In addition, the MoEPRD ensures the publicity of current information and prepares an annual report on the implementation of green procurement. The responsibility of institutions involved in training in the field of public catering is set by the Education Law. The competence of the Ministry of Education and Culture involves planning subsidies paid by the government (calculations of the amount and distribution of funding) and supervising the supply of food to educational institutions and the content of educational programmes. Accordingly, **Cabinet Regulation No. 614** Procedures for Calculating, Allocating and Using Funding Provided from the State Budget for Catering to Learners sets the procedure for calculating, allocating and spending funding on meals for schoolchildren who are in primary education, full-time, in years 1, 2, 3 and 4, as well as the amount of government funding per schoolchild per day.<sup>13</sup>

**Cabinet Regulation No. 610** sets hygiene requirements for educational institutions. The regulations include work culture in the kitchen, proper storage of food products and prepared meals, proper procurement of food products, meal frequency and timing, table manners, menu development and other conditions.<sup>14</sup>

**Cabinet Regulation No. 172**, which outlines Nutritional Requirements for Learners of Educational Institutions, Clients of Social Care and Social Rehabilitation Institutions, and Patients of Medical Institutions, sets specific nutritional standards. These standards restrict the consumption of unhealthy foods, salt, and flavor enhancers in school meals, as well as the foods that can be purchased within educational institutions and their territories, supplementing the complex and optional menus.

The criteria for food quality set by **Cabinet Regulation No. 353**, which outlines the Requirements for GPP Procurement and the Procedure for the Application Thereof, aim to increase the proportion of local, particularly organic, food procured through GPP procedures. However, the current involvement of local food producers in GPP remains minimal.

The Ministry of Agriculture implements the EU support programme "Milk and Fruit for Schools," which supplies educational institutions with fruits, vegetables, and milk. This initiative aims to foster healthy eating habits, promote the consumption of fresh products, and educate schoolchildren and their families about the importance of a nutritious diet, agricultural production, environmental protection, and related topics.<sup>15</sup>

## Costs of implementation

Currently, Cabinet Regulation No. 614 is in force. Over several years, the amount of government funding per schoolchild has been changed, and since 1 September 2022, the amount has been set at EUR 2.15 per day for state educational institutions and EUR 1.075 per day for municipal and private educational institutions. In accordance with the amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 614 adopted on 27 June 2023, the amount of government funding per schoolchild per day was increased to EUR 3.09 for state educational institutions and EUR 1.545 for municipal and private educational institutions. This amount was allocated and

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.varam.gov.lv/lv/media/6223/download?attachment>

<sup>13</sup> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/311355-kartiba-kada-aprekina-pieskir-un-izlieto-valsts-budzeta-paredzetos-lidzeklus-izglitojamo-edinasanai>

<sup>14</sup> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/69952-higienas-prasibas-izglitibas-iestadem-kas-isteno-visparejas-pamatizglitibas-visparejas-videjas-izglitibas-profesionalas-pamatiz>

<sup>15</sup> <https://piensaugliskolai.lv/lv/par-programmu/programma-skolas-piens/>

transferred to municipalities for each school day. School days are calculated in accordance with a Cabinet regulation, which sets the beginning and end of a school year and school semesters. Table 5 shows catering costs for schoolchildren in year 1.

The Education Law (section 59, Part 3<sup>1</sup>) stipulates that municipalities participate in covering the cost of meals for educatees who are in primary education in years 1, 2, 3 and 4 in the educational institutions located in the administrative territory of the respective municipality (except for state educational institutions). To cover the daily cost of meals per schoolchild, the funding from the municipal budget shall be no less than that provided by the national government. However, according to Paragraph 8 of Cabinet Regulation No. 614, the director of the educational institution has the right to use the unspent government funding for meals for those in years 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. At present, each municipality covers the cost of catering services for other years from the municipal budget, depending on its specific needs and possibilities. According to the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the requirement that the local government participate in covering the cost of meals for full-time primary schoolchildren in years 1, 2, 3 and 4 in educational institutions located within the administrative territory of the municipality (except for public educational institutions) came into force in 2023. Consequently, many municipalities reduced their free lunch programmes for those in years 5-12.

According to the Association of Latvian Catering Companies, on average 15-20% of educatees in years 5-12 have one of the social statuses (poor, children with special needs, 3+ families) (Table 6), as well as there are municipalities that 100% subsidise lunch for all educatees (Jurmala, Sigulda, Saulkrasti, Salaspils etc.) or partially subsidise it (Riga, Daugavpils, Liepaja, Valmiera, Bauska, Aluksne, Ropazi, Olaine etc.). The following table shows the funding model for years 1-4 (the only group in the school meal programme funded from the national and municipal budgets).

*Table 5: Cost analysis of school meals at national level*

Indicator	
Number of children	85 143
Average cost of a meal (EUR)	3.09
Cost of raw material	20%
Labour costs	20%
Family participation	Nul
City budget per child and meal	50% of the average meal cost
Government budget per schoolchild and meal	50% of the average meal cost
Number of teaching days per year in one school year	approximately 175
Number of school meal days in one school year	approximately 175

## Financing

In Latvia, school meals are funded from three basic sources:

- the national government budget (50% for years 1-4)
- the municipal budget (50% for years 1-4 and 100% for children with a social status in years 5-12)
- parent contributions (for years 5-12, municipal funding ranges from 0 to 100%, depending on the available municipality resources. The parents cover the rest).

In accordance with the Law on the State Budget and the Budget Framework for 2024, 2025 and 2026, the funding allocated for 2024 for the sub-programme 01.07.00 Subsidies for Free Lunches for Schoolchildren in Years 1, 2, 3 and 4 totalled EUR 22 050 785.

*Table 6: Estimates for current national and local government funding*

State budget (EUR million)	Municipal budgets, (EUR million)			Total, (EUR million)
Years 1-4	Years 1-4	Social status (about 15-20%)	Current co-funding for all	
		Years 5-12	Years 5-12	
<b>22.6</b>	<b>22.6</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>80.2</b>

*Estimated by the Latvian Association of Catering Companies*

Depending on the specific needs and possibilities, each municipality covers the cost of catering services from the municipal budget for classes in years 5-12. Accordingly, this means that the municipalities that do not have sufficient financial resources to fully cover the cost of lunch for children in years 5-12, their parents cover the remaining funding.

## Monitoring and evaluation

The MoEPRD is responsible for the application procedure, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of GPP. The MoEPRD<sup>16</sup> designs green procurement guidelines for food and provides green procurement training and technical support to procurement specialists. At the same time, the MoEPRD ensures the publicity of current information and prepares an annual report on the implementation of green procurement. The responsibility of institutions involved in training in the field of public catering is set by the Education Law (entered into force on 01/06/1999). The competence of the Ministry of Education and Culture involves planning subsidies paid by the government (calculations of the amount and distribution of funding) and supervising the supply of food to educational institutions and the content of educational programmes. The Ministry of Health is an authority responsible for setting the energy and nutrient contents for educatees referred to in Cabinet Regulation No. 172.

The Procurement Monitoring Bureau (PMU) and the State Regional Development Agency (SRDA) administer data from the electronic procurement system (EPS) on public procurements that apply environmental criteria. Once a quarter (up to April 15, July 15, October 15 and January 15), local governments submit to the PMU a report on food supply contracts concluded in the previous quarter, pursuant to Part 3 of Section 19 of the Public Procurement Law (contracts less than EUR 42000). The report includes information on the products to be procured, suppliers with whom the contracts have been concluded, contract prices, as well as information on compliance with the principles of green procurement. The supply contract report is prepared and submitted using the PMU EPS system.

In the procurement of food and catering services, the conformity of the goods delivered with the nutritional requirements is controlled on a random basis by the Food and Veterinary Service (FVS), which is a control institution subordinate to the Ministry of Health.

## Lessons learned and best practices

- The legal framework for GPP sets a too high weight for price criteria (no more than 50%), and a too low weight for GPP criteria (not less than 35%) in identifying the most

<sup>16</sup> Paragraph 14 of Cabinet Regulation No. 353 Requirements for GPP and the Procedure for the Application Thereof

economically advantageous tender, e.g. estimates of the amount of organic foods procured through GPP procedures reveal that milk and dairy products, fresh meat, potato and fresh fruit can be included in full (100%) in GPP procurement by municipal schools.<sup>17</sup> This means that the potential for organic food to provide schoolchildren with local food is not fully used.

- The majority of the schoolchildren (64.4%) considered the food served not tasty because the food was unfamiliar, tasteless, watery, overcooked, fat, smelled bad and was poorly prepared (“Do you like lunch at school” survey, 2023). The schoolchildren believed that the most important thing was that the food tasted good (65.5%), was healthy (62.1%) and beautifully presented (61.6%). The majority or 73.6% would like to have an opportunity to choose between several types of meals.<sup>18</sup> A study was carried out in 90 municipal schools with 11,021 pupils and made it possible to characterize the percentages of canteen attendance and the reasons for non-attendance (Appendix 1).<sup>19</sup>
- Food waste is high, reaching 8 to 10% of an average 600 g lunch (survey in Riga – StratKIT project). It is linked to individual preferences, family eating habits, meal quality, the school canteen environment, meal service, and teacher involvement.<sup>20</sup>
- According to the Latvian Association of Catering Companies, the current school lunch cost of EUR 3.09 (years 1-4) could be reduced to EUR 2.90 if the range of free lunch recipients were extended up to year 6 (years 1-6) and up to EUR 2.80 if the range were extended up to year 12 (MoA working group’s materials 2024, unpublished data). Cost reduction could be achieved by increasing class size, that is, the number of students, which would lower fixed costs per meal such as staff salaries, electricity, rent, and other operational expenses.
- Given the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the government's swift response—particularly in supporting school meals—the free food parcels provided significant support to families with school-aged children. These parcels were well received and offered a sense of security, especially for parents who had lost their jobs.<sup>21</sup>
- In 2015, a survey conducted by the Latvian Centre for Agricultural Advisory and Training (LLKC) in the municipality of Tukums showed that prioritizing local products in public procurement increased municipal tax revenues and local spending, while also creating jobs in food production and horticulture.<sup>22</sup>

## Challenges

- to continue working on expanding the **range of recipients of free lunches or lunches co-funded by the national and local governments** in the coming years, gradually expanding the range at least up to year 9 to provide the schoolchildren with high-quality and nutritious food, as well as to ensure the application of GPP criteria to public procurement to procure higher quality food and catering services in accordance with the current legal framework.

<sup>17</sup> [https://lbtufb.lbtu.lv/disertacijas/Food-economics/Lasma\\_Aleksejeva-promocijas-darbs\\_LBTU\\_2024.pdf](https://lbtufb.lbtu.lv/disertacijas/Food-economics/Lasma_Aleksejeva-promocijas-darbs_LBTU_2024.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.zm.gov.lv/lv/media/12879/download?attachment>

<sup>19</sup> [https://izglitiba.riga.lv/izglitiba?target=news\\_item&news\\_item=peta-edinasanas-kvalitati-rigas-valstspilsetas-pasvaldibas-skolas-12832](https://izglitiba.riga.lv/izglitiba?target=news_item&news_item=peta-edinasanas-kvalitati-rigas-valstspilsetas-pasvaldibas-skolas-12832)

<sup>20</sup> [https://lufb.llu.lv/conference/foodbalt/2019/Riekstina\\_Dolge\\_et\\_al\\_N062\\_FoodBalt2019.pdf](https://lufb.llu.lv/conference/foodbalt/2019/Riekstina_Dolge_et_al_N062_FoodBalt2019.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/13/12/4211>

<sup>22</sup> [http://new.llkc.lv/system/files\\_force/aktualitates/petijums.pdf](http://new.llkc.lv/system/files_force/aktualitates/petijums.pdf)

- to develop **guidelines for procurement specialists** on how procurement should be structured with GPP criteria and a **standard procurement contract** that would contain all information required by the relevant legal acts, thereby facilitating the preparation of procurement documentation.
- to **improve the control of the quality requirements** specified in GPP contracts on the part of the customer, e.g. to introduce a QR code system for food traceability or possibilities of the FVS to punish dishonest suppliers for detected violations during the GPP implementation, (creation of data storage of dishonest suppliers and service providers with penal register).
- to **standardise and design sample menus**, giving preference to seasonal, local and diversified food. These sample menus need to be included in the guidelines for sustainable school catering(planning a day without meat, a soup day and integrating the foods included in the Milk and Fruit for School programme (fruits, vegetables, milk) and bread in the menu). The development of a standardized menu would ensure that all children receive an equivalent meal and allow for accurate forecasting of product quantities—specifically, the annual amount of food products needed per child. This approach would also enable more efficient meal cost management..
- to **integrate the issues of sustainable and healthy nutrition into the curricula**. The schoolchildren need to be familiarised with the process of producing food from the field to the table to recognise the foods produced by national producers, their role in nutrition.
- **Improve knowledge for reducing food loss and waste**, for example, by involving students in composting in school gardens. Provide training for kitchen staff on the efficient use of food, storage, and reduction of leftovers (including reuse).

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## Related resources and data sources

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### Appendix 1

In cooperation with the EDURIO platform, satisfaction measurements of school catering services were assessed in Riga 2023. The survey involved 90 municipal schools and 11021 schoolchildren. It was concluded that more than half of the respondents (56%), ate lunch at school every day, 24% indicated that they did not eat lunch at school, 13% indicated that they eat lunch at school 3-4 days a week, and 7% of the respondents did it 1-2 times a week. The main reasons why the schoolchildren did not eat lunch in their schools were as follows: the food was not tasty (64%), some food was brought from home (21%), the break was too short to eat lunch (11%), no safety feeling in the school canteen because others humiliated them (8%), the family could not afford to pay for lunch (8%), special diets that set dietary restrictions (7%), the food did not meet the schoolchildren's needs (too fat, cold, tasteless and other reasons) (14%).