



National Action Plan

RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL POLICY DIALOGUE (NPD) FRANCE

*Dialogue for National Policy Proposals on
School Food Reform in France*

Paris – 04.09.2024



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The **National Policy Dialogue (NPD) France** was held on the morning of **September 4, 2024**, gathering approximately 25 French stakeholders, both in person and online, at the **Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation** in **Paris**. This event was organised as part of the **European project SchoolFood4Change (SF4C)**, aimed at addressing key challenges in school food policies and promoting a shift toward healthier and more sustainable school meals. The dialogue provided a unique opportunity to discuss the evolution of school food policies in France and Europe, particularly in a context of increasing concerns regarding environmental and public health issues.

Before delving into the main topics, it is useful to provide a brief overview of the French social foodservice sector.

The social foodservices market in France is a key sector, representing approximately 22% of out-of-home food consumption. It is mainly divided into three segments: school catering, hospital catering and corporate catering. In 2023, this market was estimated to be worth over 22 billion euros, with growth driven by evolving food quality standards and the rising importance of environmental and public health criteria.

A closer look at school catering shows that this segment accounts for approximately 40% of the total foodservices market in France. Every day, nearly 7 million students eat in school canteens, amounting to nearly one billion meals served annually. These services are mostly managed by public service delegations or specialized companies, such as Elixor, Sodexo, and Compass.

Current challenges in school catering include improving the nutritional quality of meals, integrating more organic and locally sourced ingredients, reducing food waste and packaging and providing clear information to consumers. The EGalim law, adopted in 2018, required that, from 2022, 50% of products used in school catering should be of quality or sustainable (including at least 20% organic products). The Climate and Resilience Law of 2021 further expanded the scope of the requirements by adding new categories of « quality and sustainable » products, introducing specific targets for meat and fish products, starting in 2024, and extending all targets also to private sector catering establishments. These legislative changes have driven transformative practices within the sector.

Thus, school catering in France plays a fundamental role not only in feeding younger generations but also in promoting healthier and more sustainable food models.

The **agenda** was structured around an introduction to the SF4C project and the relevant policy framework at the European and French levels, presented respectively par Chiara Falvo (Eating City) and Marion Tanniou (France Urbaine). This was followed by two interactive sessions: the first to identify obstacles and challenges within the current school food system, and the second to propose opportunities and concrete actions for change. Participants shared their ideas on Post-it notes, which were then presented, grouped, and discussed together.



The **National Action Plan** below is **structured around six key questions**, sent to participants before the meeting and then discussed during the roundtable in Paris.

This plan summarizes the discussion results and proposes a roadmap for future actions.

1. What is the wanted target/desired future and how does that connected to existing or non-existent policies today?

The future of school catering in France is rooted in a sustainable food system that prioritizes the production and consumption of healthy, high-quality products. School catering must be environmentally friendly, socially equitable, and economically sustainable, serving as a catalyst for stronger connections between urban and rural areas through agricultural planning and the development of short supply chains. It should also be an inclusive and collaborative project, involving all members of the school community in designing educational activities around food. This future is based on a long-term, systemic vision for school catering. It is linked to existing policies, which, however, often lack coherence and integration.

- **Policy fragmentation** : On the one hand, there is a lack of vertical integration of policies across different levels of government – European, national, regional, and municipal. On the other hand, at the same level of government, there is a lack of horizontal integration between different ministries, departments, and competencies – such as education, health, agriculture, rural development, economy, tourism, and infrastructure – which often operate in isolation. This compartmentalized approach to collective and school catering hinder the coordinated and integrated action necessary to impact food systems ;
- **Legal constraints** : Certain regulations hinder changes, particularly those governing nutrition, food hygiene, waste management, and public procurement (for example, they do not sufficiently support plant-based diets or short supply chains) ;
- **Budgeting issues** : The budget allocated to school catering is insufficient, as it often does not account for the costs associated with environmental, health and social externalities related to the life cycle of food and catering that could be saved.

2. What are the biggest obstacles or challenges in this field of action that have stood in the way of implementing measures and changes so far?

The highlighted difficulties can be grouped into four main themes.

1. POLITICAL VISION, GOVERNANCE, REGULATIONS

- **Lack of a comprehensive, coherent, long-term vision** of public policies on school catering. There is also a mismatch between political time, which is becoming shorter and shorter, and the time needed to bring about change, which is much longer ;
- **Lack of cooperation and coordination** of actions across different levels and territorial schemes. For example, although regional frameworks such as the Territorial Food Projects (PAT), the Territorial Coherence Schemes (SCOT), and the Regional Agricultural Operations Master Plans (SDREA) can contribute to the transition, there is insufficient coordination among them and with collective catering ;
- **Insufficient inclusion of local stakeholders** and the school community (including parents and students) in the planning and implementation of school food projects. This limits the ownership and effectiveness of the initiatives ;
- **Lack of traceability and transparency** throughout the supply chains makes it difficult to control product quality, reinforcing the asymmetry of information, particularly on the distribution of profits between the various actors, working conditions and environmental impacts ;
- **Rigid and outdated regulatory framework**: some rules on nutrition, waste, hygiene and safety, and public procurement are too rigid, challenging to implement and sometimes misaligned with the current objectives of school and collective catering (ex. on promoting more plant-based diets, or allowing flexible procurement procedures to buy from local producers).

2. SUPPLY, PRODUCTION AND LOGISTICS

- **Lack of knowledge of local food systems** : diagnostics and market studies are not conducted systematically, hampering the understanding of food availability and actors' needs ;
- **Weak structuring of local supply chains**: local supply chains are insufficiently structured, leading to a limited availability of high-quality and sustainable products. This is exacerbated by a lack of cooperation among smaller producers, which would be necessary to meet public market requirements. Collaborations could include sharing production, distribution tools and administrative competences for managing public contracts ;
- **Lack of effective tools for connecting producers to public markets** limits opportunities for local sourcing ;
- **Operating model**: the current operating model – highly based on centralization of kitchens for school catering and public food procurement – complicates local supply due to big volumes and the significant distances between agricultural production sites, meal preparation facilities, and places of consumption. This distance also affects food quality, traceability, and transparency.

3. BUDGET AND FINANCEMENT

- **Insufficient budget allocation**: local authorities face an insufficient budget, especially for financing the purchase of organic and high-quality products. This funding is crucial to support large-scale, long-term transitions in the food system. The current budget reflects a short-term perspective, prioritizing price over the consideration of negative externalities related to the environment, public health, education and social inclusion. As an exemple, the funding under the France Relance program is viewed as inadequate to achieve the desired scale of change.
- **Tarification dilemmas** : There is a dilemma regarding pricing strategies, with local authorities having to balance the objective of solidarity pricing (which considers household income), or even of free pricing, while dealing with limited financial and institutional capacities.

- **Economic viability of public contracts:** maintaining the economic balance of public contracts is challenging, in particular due to the higher costs of sustainable practices, and large variations in the prices of raw materials, energy, etc.
- **Measuring economic benefits:** difficulty arises in measuring and monetizing the overall benefits of sustainable school meal programs. Without clear metrics, justifying investments in these programs remains challenging.

4. HUMAN AND MATERIAL RESOURCES

- **Insufficient human resources:** schools and catering services experience recruitment challenges, an aging workforce, and job instability ;
- **Lack of specialised training** for school catering professions, for example for cooks focused on sustainable, plant-based, and homemade cooking techniques, and for public officials on planning, awarding and managing public contracts ;
- **Resistance to change** : changing established habits poses challenges, both among school and catering staff and within the dietary habits of the student (and families) population ;
- **Inadequate infrastructure and equipment:** many school buildings and kitchens (where they exist) are inadequate are facilitating changes in food preparation practices. Insufficient kitchen facilities and equipment, for example, hinder efforts to cook closer to pupils or use fresh, raw ingredients.

3. What concrete changes would have to occur in the short term (2025) so that the outlined target picture can be achieved?

- **Strengthening local food planning** : enhance coordination among territorial planning schemes to support supply chains for school catering. Making systematic use of tools to assess local food systems and integrate sourcing strategies in public procurement for school meals (e.g. the BASIC methodology) ;
- **Developing local logistics and food processing infrastructures**, such as vegetable preparation centers, to facilitate local supply ;
- **Training for school catering and educational staff** : provide specialized training in sustainable practices, including plant-based nutrition, food waste reduction, and effective communication strategies ;
- **Engaging the entire school community**: involve all school community members (cooks, students, teachers, parents, providers and suppliers) in a cohesive and shared sustainable food project ;
- **Expanding food education initiatives**: promote food education, for example through activities like farm visits, kitchen tours, vegetable gardens in schools, and celebratory culinary events ;
- **Multi-level, multi-channel communication** : establish consistent communication across various channels (including local media and social networks) to raise awareness and support for sustainable school catering initiatives ;
- **Advocating for EU public procurement rules reform**: support the revision of Directive 2014/24/EU and other public procurement related rules to improve access to local products, simplify procedures, and promote the use of planning and monitoring tools.

4. What concrete changes would have to occur in the medium term (2030) in order to achieve the outlined target picture?

- **Developing a systemic vision** for sustainable food and food systems : recognise and communicate the broad benefits of sustainable food and food systems for public health, education, environmental well-being, and socio-economic inclusion ;
- **Promoting a cultural shift where school food** becomes a pillar of social and environmental justice, and an educational tool to prepare students to future challenges. Working more closely with the French education system to integrate sustainable food into the school curriculum ;
- **Strengthening local cooperation and supply chains** foster collaboration among local food actors, enabling resource sharing to improve logistics, product traceability, and quality ;
- **Increasing budget allocation** specifically for food transition projects, funding sustainable local supply chain development, investments in human and material resources, and rewarding incentives for public administrations and schools who achieve targets that go beyond EGALIM ;
- **Increasing transparency and public awareness:** improve transparency throughout food systems and in school catering, to allow better traceability and quality control. Facilitate public discussions on the implications of public spending that support certain private actors and supply chain models that may have negative ecological and social impacts ;
- **Investing in decentralised and modernised infrastructure** : transition towards more decentralized kitchens, enabling meal preparation on school premises or in small community kitchens, with modernized infrastructures to support sustainable cooking ;
- **Enhancing the value of school catering professionals** : improve their recognition, job security, and training ;
- **Revising and adapting regulatory standards on nutrition** to allow for greater flexibility in school menus and advancing criteria for healthy and sustainable diets
- Developing practical **tools to help reduce waste**, such as the anti-waste labeling ;

5. What concrete changes would have to occur in the long term (2050) in order for the outlined target picture to be achieved?

- **Achieve harmonisation and integration of food policies** at all governance levels - national, regional and local ;
- **Advance toward a regionalized food system with sustainable supply capacities** for school catering, through coordinated, inter-municipal approaches;
- **Ensure financial autonomy for local authorities** to guarantee the viability of school food projects, potentially supported by innovative financial models like Social Food Security.

6. Which actors and organizations have committed to take action, connected to the desired outcome?

During the round table, representatives of the following stakeholders¹ committed to contributing to the objectives identified.

- **Local and national elected representatives** involved in the food transition ;
- **Municipality/local administration representatives**, including directors of the relevant departments and heads of food projects ;
- **Networks of schools and municipalities** ;
- **NGOs and associations** working in the fields of organic farming, nutrition and health, regional cooperation and development, and training.
- **Researchers, research groups and research institutes** working in the fields of agriculture, food and the environment, sustainable production and consumption practices and territorial development ;
- **Youth networks** ;
- **Professional and trade associations** active in the catering sector.

¹There were no representatives from the following segments : school canteen managers; Parent and pupil councils; Catering service providers / wholesalers / producers; Media; Consultants.

ROADMAP FOR ACTION

In order to achieve the objectives set during the French National Policy Dialogue, and make a successful transition to a sustainable school catering system, several concrete actions must be undertaken at different levels.

It is essential to strengthen cooperation between local, regional and national actors in order to ensure better coordination of public food policies, which will enhance efficiency and systemic impact.

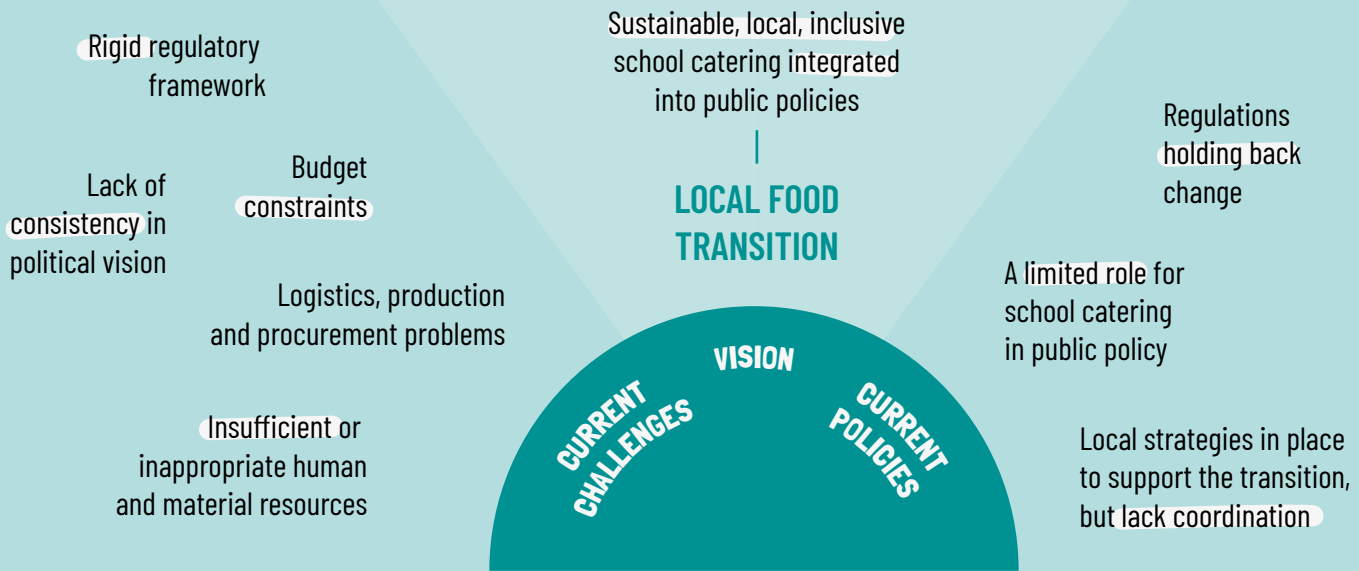
The revision of regulatory frameworks on nutrition, hygiene and public procurement, particularly European Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement, could facilitate a more territorialised, flexible and tailored approach to the sustainable transformation of school catering.

At the same time, increased financial support for local authorities is essential to invest in the necessary infrastructure and to enhance human resources, particularly through training and recognition of school catering professions.

Moreover, mobilizing the entire school community (parents, pupils, cooks and canteen staff, administrators, educators, etc.) is necessary to build coherent and shared food projects.

Finally, effective, multichannel communication is essential to raise public awareness and spread a sustainable food culture.

The stakeholders engaged - municipalities, elected representatives, associations, school networks and research institutes - must play a key role in making school food a lever for social and environmental justice, while ensuring a healthy and sustainable future for young people. This roadmap, supported by a strengthened governance framework, aims to make school food a pillar of public food policies at both national and European levels, ensuring consistency across the various levels and promoting a genuine food transition in France and Europe.



CHANGES TO BE IMPLEMENTED

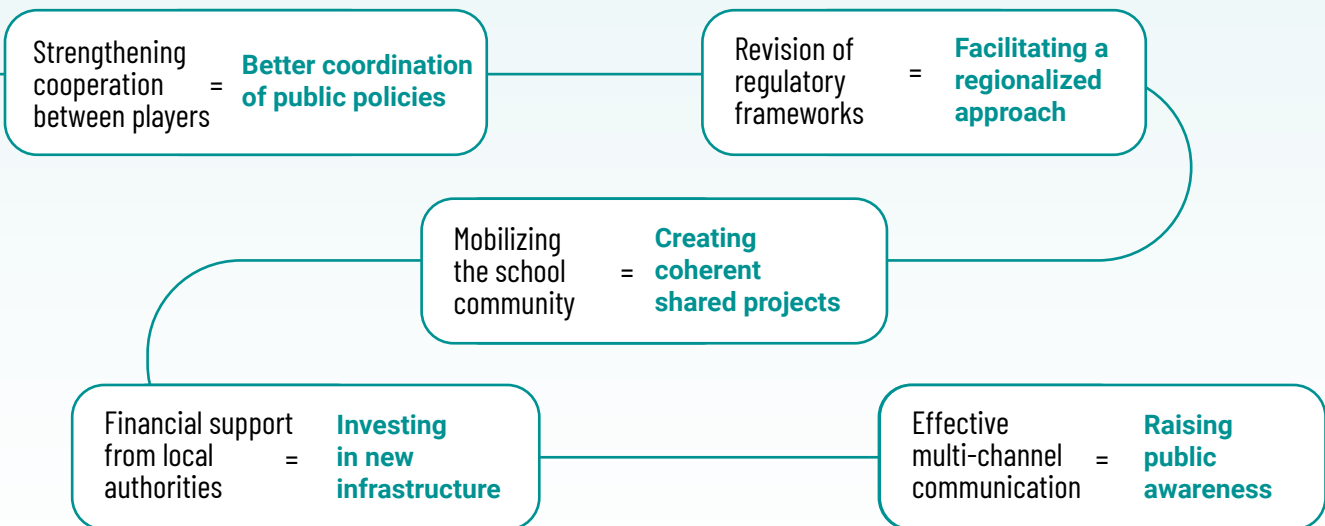
2025
SHORT TERM

2030
MEDIUM TERM

2050
LONG TERM

	System transparency	
Staff training	Decentralized kitchens	
Food education	Menus flexibility	
Communication on school catering projects	Integrating sustainable food into the school curriculum	Harmonized policies to support school canteens
Developing food processing tools	Increase in local budgets	Regionalization of food systems
Strengthening territorial planning	Recognition and enhancement of professions	Local financial autonomy

ROADMAP



PARTICIPANTS AT NPD ON 04.09.2024

Name	Organization	Presence
Marie Dominique Tatard	Caisse des écoles	On location
Fabien Charlon	Assistant Sen. N Havet	On location
Hélène Zwingelstein	Anthropologue - Transitions/ Territoires/Alimentation	Zoom
Muriel Bagni-Couthenx	Cheffe de projet Plan Alimentation Durable - Transition Alimentaire Ville de Paris	On location
Marie Massart	Déléguée à la Politique alimentaire et à l'Agriculture urbaine Montpellier	On location
Estelle Jacq	Cheffe de projet School Food 4 Change Ville de Lyon	Zoom
Léonie GERBIER	Federation des diabetiques	Zoom
Justine Dahmani	INRAE	Zoom
Jeanne Tantot	Hub Cycle/ SF4C Ambassador	On location
Sylvestre NIVET	Agores – Chargé de Mission	On location
Gilles Perole	Mairie de Mouans Sartoux	Zoom
Lydie DELOFFRE	Cheffe de projet « Transformation de la restauration scolaire à la Ville de Strasbourg »	On location
Ellie Daguet	CIRAD	Zoom
Marion Tanniou	France Urbaine	On location
Chiara Falvo	Eating City / School Food 4 Change	On location
Maurizio Mariani	Eating City / School Food 4 Change	On location
Christophe Alliot	Le Basic	On location
Vincent DEMAISON	Departement Dordogne	Zoom
Camille Labro	L'école comestible	On location

PARTICIPANTS AT NPD ON 04.09.2024

Name	Organization	Presence
Angèle Tasse	ICLEI	Zoom
Stephanie BICHARD	Les Insatiables Secteur Transition écologique	On location
Laura Sauques	Organic Europe	On location
Thomas Emmanuel	Ville de Montpellier	On location
Giffard Gaelle	Ville de Lilas	On location

Event organised by:



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