

The FTAO's feedback to the European Commission's public consultation on strengthening the European Child Guarantee (ECG)

April 2026

Making the European Child Guarantee deliver through sustainable and fair school meals

As the European Union reviews progress under the European Child Guarantee (ECG), it should treat school food as a core policy tool, not a logistical afterthought. For many children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, the school meal is the most reliable meal of the day. If access to healthy food depends on where a child lives, inequality is being reproduced rather than reduced. The Whole School Food Approach (WSFA), developed through SchoolFood4Change EU project, offers a practical way to connect nutrition, education, sustainability and social inclusion.

The strength of the WSFA is that it does not treat catering in isolation. It links leadership, food quality and sustainability, food education, and community partnership. This matters because school meals have the greatest impact when they are part of everyday school life: when children not only eat better, but also learn where food comes from, how it is produced, and why food choices affect health, fairness and the environment.

This is where **Fair Trade** should be more clearly recognised in the Child Guarantee. Healthy school food is not only about nutritional value; it is also about the conditions under which food is produced and traded. Public money should not support supply chains linked to exploitation, unsafe working conditions or opaque sourcing. The SchoolFood4Change procurement handbook shows that Fair Trade and decent labour conditions can be built into school food contracts through criteria on certification, traceability and due diligence. It also proposes that a significant share of coffee, tea, sugar and exotic fruit supplied under contracts should come from Fair Trade-certified or equivalent sources.

This is especially relevant for products commonly used in schools but not produced in Europe, such as cocoa, bananas, tea and sugar. A good school food policy should therefore combine support for local and regional producers with Fair Trade sourcing for products that must be imported.

Fair Trade Schools also reinforce this approach by linking procurement with education. They show how schools can help children understand workers' rights, global supply chains and responsible consumption alongside healthy eating. This is fully consistent with the

WSFA, which treats food education as an essential part of school food policy rather than an optional add-on.

There are already practical examples to build on. In Milan, Fair Trade sugar and cocoa have been included in school desserts since 2012, showing that ethical sourcing can be integrated into public catering in a realistic and lasting way.

Three steps now matter most: establish EU minimum standards for healthy school food and food education, including ethical sourcing and Fair Trade criteria where relevant; invest in long-term local coordination so schools, procurers, teachers and caterers can work together; and create a permanent cross-departmental home for school food policy linking the Child Guarantee with health, education, agriculture, procurement and social inclusion.

If the European Child Guarantee is serious about children's rights, it must look beyond calorie provision alone. School food should help children to flourish, support farmers and workers fairly, and teach the values of justice, dignity and sustainability in practice. The lunch hour is not a side issue. It is one of the clearest policy levers the EU has.

For further evidence and resources: schoolfood4change.eu/resources/, on Fair Trade Schools : <https://fairtradetowns.net>

About the Fair Trade Advocacy Office (FTAO):



The Fair Trade Advocacy Office (FTAO) leads political advocacy for the Fair Trade Movement at the EU level. It has the purpose of promoting justice, equity and sustainable development at the heart of trade structures and practices so that everyone, through their work, can maintain a decent and dignified livelihood and develop their full human potential.

The FTAO is a joint initiative of Fairtrade International, the World Fair Trade Organization, and the World Fair Trade Organization-Europe.

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