



Guide to prepare an Action Plan for managing public meal provision in a food crisis situation

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1 ABOUT THE GUIDE TO PREPARE AN ACTION PLAN

1.1 Why is an Action Plan relevant?

The public sector provides a considerable amount of meals daily across Europe demonstrating that many people depend on food provided by schools, hospitals, care homes as well as in government institutions, prisons, and by armed forces. The societal dependency on a continuous provision of meals in the public sector is evident. Under normal circumstances, the public sector is highly capable of delivering meals whereas in situations of crises this may change. Local, national or international situations may occur that disturb the public meal service at varying degrees. Public meal service is therefore an issue that concerns a diversity of stakeholders, e.g. at municipality levels, nationwide, or in a specific kitchen or institution.

Major incidents such as the COVID-19 pandemic with the lockdown and restrictions as well as the massive flow of refugees from Ukraine have shown that, local authorities have to find new ways to manage the public meal service under disturbed conditions. Examples of mitigation actions to respond to such conditions include re-organising the supply chain or the need to establish new facilities for cooking and serving meals. Another experience from these crises is that authorities and meal providers may have to interact and collaborate with new actors, for example groups of volunteers or food banks for food distribution. Local authorities play a central role in ensuring long-term resilience in public meal service.

The adaptation of public meal service to changing circumstances requires a high degree of flexibility and readiness by the key stakeholders involved in procuring, cooking, and distributing the meals. There is a need to identify potential risks and vulnerabilities in normal times to improve preparedness by key stakeholders to ensure continuity in the public meal service. Therefore, it is important that local authorities are prepared for incidents that could impact on public meal provision. Preparedness for any undesired event helps sustain regular public meal services. Learnings from particularly the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the way school meals were provided have inspired this Guide.

The Guide is intended to support key stakeholders to elaborate plans to better manage under disturbed conditions so public meal production and distribution can be sustained. The Guide does not substitute any national or local plans already drawn up by relevant authorities or entities. Nor does the Guide provide any advice on food safety risks and mitigation measures. **The scope of the Guide is**

to inspire public meal stakeholders to consider how to act in situations when normal procurement, production and distribution practices are disturbed by minor or major incidents. This is what we consider as “preparedness”.

The Guide is presented at a generic level and the reader is encouraged to adapt any idea or recommendation to their own context, situation and country. The Guide is developed to mainly serve the needs of municipalities and their (clusters of) kitchens with additional target groups being e.g., produce meals or participate in the supply chain. The Guide is complemented with a toolkit that offers tools for crisis management and tools for enhancing the sustainability of the public meal. The tools are available from this website [Welcome to the Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit! - StratKIT Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit \(sustainable-public-meal.eu\)](https://www.stratkitt.eu/welcome-to-the-sustainable-public-meal-toolkit/)

The Guide is the result of research activities and national stakeholder consultations in eight countries in the Baltic Sea region. The StratKIT+ project involves partners (both academia and public meal stakeholders) from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden. The authors of the Guide are not liable to any results or incidents that may occur as a consequence of using the Guide or the StratKIT+ toolkit.

1.2 What is a food crisis?

A crisis is a situation that clearly stands out from “normal” and provokes major changes in daily routines. A food crisis occurs when the food supply is suddenly disrupted to a significant scale, regular public meal service cannot be sustained, or there is a sudden increase in the number of people depending on public meal provision. This calls for preparedness, networking and, action; thus motivates the relevance of this Guide.

A crisis could be triggered by external conditions with a major impact on normality. Drivers of food crises which have a big impact on the availability of food for people could be the following:

- Health crisis – e.g. food pollution or human mobility restrictions to prevent infectious diseases
- Economic crisis – e.g. rapidly increasing food prices
- Security crisis – e.g. war and conflicts
- Ecological crisis – e.g. natural disasters that cause significant disruptions in food supply chains or physical barriers to food access

The crisis could lead to:

- Closure and restrictions of the food operations (production, markets, food services, etc.)
- Closure and restrictions of restaurants, canteens, food outlets
- Closure and restrictions of schools and, as a result, suspension of school meals
- Restrictions on personal mobility

These closures and restrictions may result in limited food access and alternated distribution services. This calls for action from those stakeholders that are responsible for providing public meals. These disturbed situations have shown that municipalities need to act fast to sustain public meals; new actors are important for realising meal provision under changed circumstances, and particularly, children, elderly and refugees are dependent on public meals.

However, also minor incidents could cause a food crisis, for example if ordered supplies were not delivered, or the school's lunch room was not accessible. In any case, a disturbance in normal procurement, production and meal distribution practices would call for actions to ensure a continued delivery of public meals.

1.3 How to start working on an Action Plan

The idea of having preparedness plans for public meal service is to motivate key stakeholders to consider **what actions could be needed to ensure continued delivery of public meals under disturbed conditions**. This calls for management actions at more governance levels: public procurement, meal production, and meal provision. Preparedness plans should take into account what

needs to be done “now” (to be better prepared for disturbed conditions) and in the near future. Getting started to work on a preparedness plan requires a leader; this guide is targeted at relevant staff groups at municipality level (e.g., in the food service department). Preparedness plans should be regularly updated to ensure their validity.

When creating preparedness plans for public meal services it is important that the plans are drawn up in collaboration with the key stakeholders involved in procurement, production and distribution of the meal. The plans must be regularly reviewed, updated and refined together with the key stakeholders to ensure their validity and operability. It is a good routine to review and adapt the plan after a situation of crisis and, record changes in practices and stakeholders in the plan.

Keep in mind that any changes in one plan (e.g. that of an important kitchen) may have an impact on plans elaborated by other entities or stakeholders. In a crisis situation it is of utmost importance that actors can work together; therefore the interfaces of diverse stakeholders' preparedness plans must be aligned and carefully considered.

For any preparedness plan to work, it is important that those who are taking actions know what to do. It is therefore a good idea to use normal conditions for training diverse personnel groups. A mapping of the baseline or normal situation is essential; this is explained in section 2. For example, procurement officials could be trained in finding local suppliers, or chefs could be trained in developing recipes for food boxes in contrast to meals. A very important topic for training is collaboration across various stakeholder groups. Learnings from the COVID-19 lockdown showed that the interfaces or connections between stakeholders were important for a successful alternative delivery of public meal service. Examples of interfaces are websites for managing volunteer groups or collaboration with restaurant kitchens.

2 MAPPING THE RISK PROFILE OF MEAL PROVISION

2.1 Mapping of the baseline routines

There are many different target groups for public meals (hospitals, kindergartens, schools, social care homes, the armed forces, and many more). The diversity of public kitchens and meal distribution systems is vast and embedded in local conditions and institutional structures. This means that the preparedness plan must be developed to target the production structure, location, supply chains and, critical risks of each kitchen in a municipality. For example, a kitchen located in a rural area could be in another situation than a kitchen in an urban area when it comes to working with local suppliers or ensuring school meals. It is also important to consider that, the risk profile could be defined for a cluster of kitchens that operate in one specific area with the same conditions.

The baseline for a preparedness plan is the **overview of routines and decision making responsibilities under normal conditions**. This should be the starting point for any preparedness plan. The overview could be elaborated to show the tasks, personnel, goods and materials, and information flows that are needed for each step in the production line from procurement to consumer, e.g. a child expecting a school meal. Furthermore, it is important to mention the responsibilities for decision making. The baseline could be elaborated at an aggregated level (general tasks), or with more details to show e.g., processing of vegetables and meat; production of frozen food items; returned goods etc. Topics that could be considered for elaborating the baseline overview are:

- Procurement structure
- Compliance with regulations and standards
- Production structure (production chains, work stations, flow of goods and materials)
- Equipment status and management
- Supply chain(s)/ suppliers for food items, materials and returned goods
- Distribution structure for meals
- Eating environment (e.g., seating and flow of people)
- Waste handling
- Cleaning up

A baseline mapping makes it easier to find an alternative solution in a situation of crisis. For example, the need to keep social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the way meals were served at schools. A solution could be to organize safety zones.

[Organizing safety zones to reduce risk of infection - StratKIT Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit \(sustainable-public-meal.eu\)](https://sustainable-public-meal.eu)

The procurement department could benefit from having a baseline overview of normal practices. For this baseline, topics to include could be such as:

- Tendering procedure(s)
- Identification and assessment of suppliers
- Compliance with regulations and standards
- Overview of kitchens and meal serving locations
- Overview of personnel available for procurement, production and distribution of meals
- Waste handling system

2.2 Using flow charts to map the risk profile of a kitchen

The risk profile of a public kitchen could be assessed by looking at e.g., the supply chain structure (long or short supply chain and, number of suppliers), the number of meals provided (municipality's dependency on the entity), the number of people depending on the public meal (e.g., elderly, sick or school children), the location of the entity (e.g. urban or rural), the state of technology and equipment in the kitchen, personnel, and other factors.

Dependency on one supplier could indicate a high risk profile. Working with several local suppliers could be a way of reducing the risk of supply chain disruption in a crises situation. Keep in mind that it takes time to organize supplies from local farmers or food companies. It is a good idea to develop a flow chart to visualize the different components in the entity's supply chain(s). By analysing supply chain flow charts, the kitchen and its suppliers could identify weak and strong points and define precautionary measures to ensure food supplies. When the supply chain flow chart is drawn up for a specific kitchen it is useful for:

- Identifying potential problems or risks that can arise anywhere along the kitchen's supply chain;
- Helping procurement departments, kitchens and supply chain professionals to quickly understand how logistics are organized and based on that, facilitate an integrated approach to ensuring meal provision;
- Facilitating communication between stakeholders, including wholesalers, manufacturers and other involved suppliers as well as procurement officers and, customers.

[Connecting with local suppliers - StratKIT Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit \(sustainable-public-meal.eu\)](#)

[Mapping organic farmers as suppliers - StratKIT Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit \(sustainable-public-meal.eu\)](#)

A flow chart (Figure 1) could cover the actions and stakeholders involved in delivering a meal, thus map the kitchen's suppliers, production/cooking facilities, inventories and storage, and distribution or service system. Once the flow of goods and services are visualized, it is recommended to add flows of money and information to the model. Having created this overview of good, services, money and information will help the kitchen to identify risks and vulnerabilities.

Remember to share the draft supply chain model with involved suppliers and customers. This will help to identify vulnerabilities, promote collaboration in times of crisis, and shorten reaction time under disturbed conditions. It is good idea to regularly update the supply chain flow chart and share the updated version with supply chain partners.

Model for supply chain flow chart in public food service

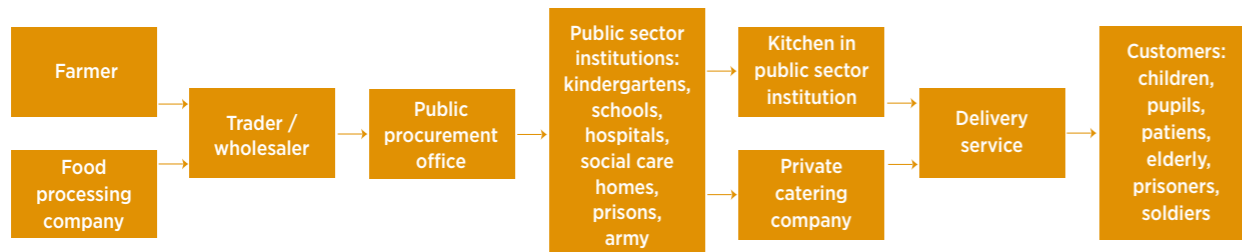


FIGURE 1. EXAMPLE OF A SUPPLY CHAIN FLOW CHART

For further reading, see [What is a supply chain diagram and how do you make one? | Indeed.com UK \(https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/supply-chain-diagram\)](#)

Any disturbance in public meal provision has a risk profile of its own. This means, for example, that the risks caused by disruptions in today's distribution of meals are different from the risks associated with a long-term closure of public meal services in e.g. schools. It is recommended to carefully consider the risk profile of different scenarios and identify the critical factors that may cause difficulties to sustain the production and distribution of meals. Critical factors could be identified internally (for example break-down of equipment or lack of personnel), or externally (for example pollution, lock-down or power black-outs).

A preparedness plan should provide strong support in situations of crises and serve as a strategic document for the municipality. It is recommended to develop action proposals for how to deal with various critical risks. For example, in the case of polluted tap water, have an action proposal for how this problem could be solved. The key issue is to think ahead and list potential solutions for small and large incidents.

In order to be prepared for the risks defined for each scenario, it is important to identify the resources that would enable a sustained meal provision. Examples of internal resources are key staff groups or contacts to suppliers, and external resources such as volunteers or kitchens belonging to the private sector e.g., catering companies or restaurants. Once the internal and external resources have been identified it is important to add this information with contact details to the preparedness plan.

It is recommended to organize a meeting with key stakeholders (identified resources) and discuss about roles and responsibilities in a crises situation.

3 CHANGED PRACTICES, COLLABORATION PARTNERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Identifying the key stakeholders and newcomers

Under normal conditions, the stakeholder network around the public meal would be well known. The network includes e.g., the procurement authority, the public kitchen, the provider of catering service, suppliers (e.g. wholesalers)

and, distributors. In a situation of crisis the stakeholder network could change to include new actors, or the role of existing actors could be altered. Therefore, it is a good idea to produce a stakeholder map to identify the primary stakeholders involved in the public meal during normal conditions, (Figure 2).

Model of public meal stakeholder map

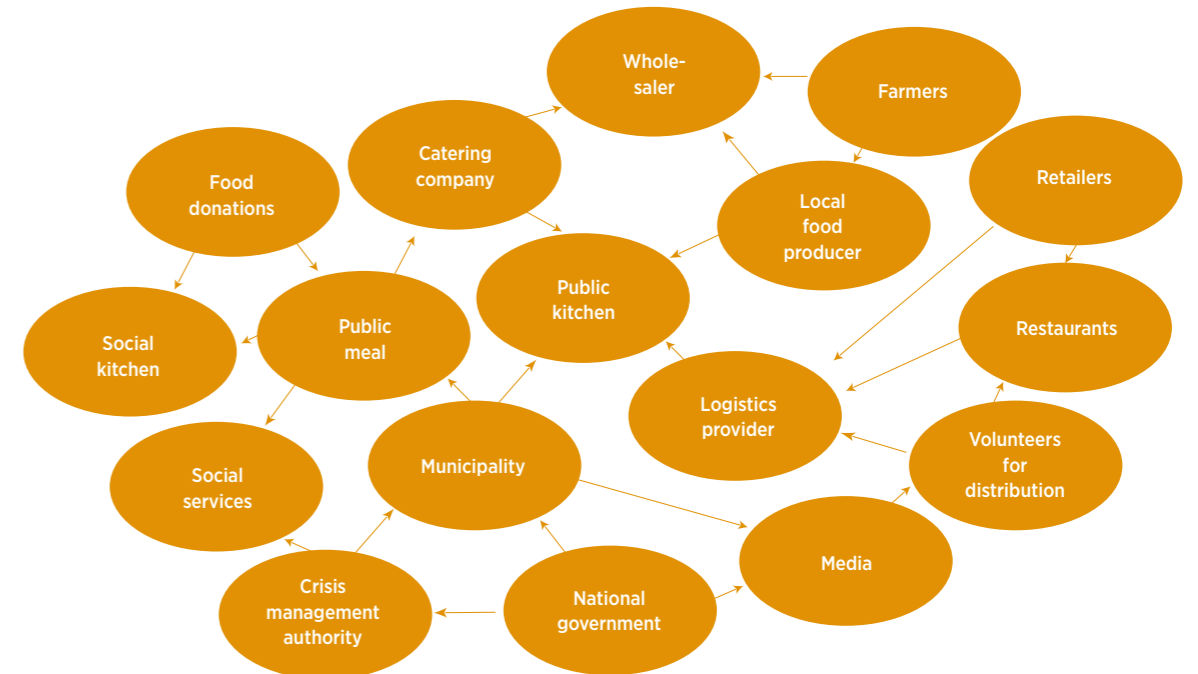


FIGURE 2. MODEL OF STAKEHOLDER MAP CENTRED ROUND THE PUBLIC MEAL

3.2 Disturbed conditions induce new tasks

Ordinary tasks connected with the provision of public meals may be impossible to carry out during disturbed conditions as this may lead to requirements for new practices, add new tasks, changes in supply chain structures, or different actions or communication methods. Table 1 provides ideas for how new and existing stakeholders could contribute to new tasks. It is important to know what additional stakeholders (newcomers) that could be involved in provision of public sector meals and what potential tasks these stakeholders could contribute to. One example is

the need to organize food boxes to substitute school meals leading to requirements for organizing a new distribution model. Another example is the need to provide cooking facilities to many vulnerable people by organizing social kitchens.

[Providing a school meal to children and teenagers in crisis situations - StratKIT Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit \(sustainable-public-meal.eu\)](#)

[Organizing social kitchens in municipalities - StratKIT Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit \(sustainable-public-meal.eu\)](#)

Table 1. Examples of new stakeholders (newcomers) and their potential contribution to the provision of public meals

Newcomers	Potential contribution / new tasks
Logistics companies	Distribute meals in urban and rural areas
Restaurants and canteens	Location for production of public meals
Farmers and food companies	Provide food products
Food banks /organizations that distribute surplus food	Provide food products and help with distribution
Volunteers	Any contribution (help to cook meals, distribute food, communication, set up web-sites etc.)
Catering companies	Packing of food boxes (to replace school meals)

It might be an idea to add newcomers to the stakeholder map already produced. This would help to visualize where the newcomers' resources could be used. It could be a good idea to form a stakeholder network to be prepared for collaborating with new actors, for example local restaurants, private drivers or local farmers.

3.3 Decision making and responsibilities

It is important to consider, and agree upon, who has the responsibility for taking action in a crisis situation as this may differ from decision making responsibilities under normal conditions. Also, it is important to clarify the hierarchy of decision making: who makes decisions about what topic, and the who has the "GO/No-GO" say. Keep in mind that in crises situations, other authorities may be involved in decision making and new procedures may be enforced; for example civil defense brigades or charity organizations could become part of the decision making process impacting on public meal provision.

Under disturbed situations, it is very often a good idea to organize a committee to manage the provision of the public meal. A committee could include representatives of meal producers, procurers, distributors, and other organizations or stakeholders for example parents. The committee would serve as a forum for sharing information and supporting decision making. Building on the example of disrupted provision of school meals, a committee could include representatives from the school (e.g., parents, kitchen manager and school management), procurement officials from the municipality, regular and new suppliers, and other stakeholders that could contribute to organizing a solution to sustain school meals during the specific crisis. The committee should organize regular meetings to monitor the situation, assess the solutions and, take action to ensure the continued provision of public meals. It is important to report the agreements and planned actions and to follow-up during the next meeting of the committee. The reporting from the committee meetings could

prove important learnings for sustaining continuity of e.g., school meals during a future crisis.

[Setting up the canteen commission - StratKIT Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit \(sustainable-public-meal.eu\)](https://sustainable-public-meal.eu)

3.4 Communication

Communication needs to be adapted to the crisis situation, for example adjusted to meet the severity of the crisis (major nationwide incident, a small local problem, or an incident in the kitchen today). Communication must be tailored to purvey the key messages to those stakeholders that are effected by the disrupted meal provision, and to those stakeholders that are involved in sustaining public meal production (and restoration if this is the situation). For example, a catering company needs to be in dialogue with the customers to inform about changes and how meal provision will be re-organized. Here, the communication office at the municipality could be an important focal point. Policy makers need clear communication and information to identify solutions in situations of crises. Keep in mind that communication with policy makers at municipality level may differ from communication with regional or national policy makers.

A structured approach to communication could be:

1. Define the target groups that are relevant for production, provision and consumption of the public meal;
2. Clarify what information each target group would need to have in a situation of crisis. Make a list of main contacts: Who do you need to inform? Whom do you need to have information from?
3. Prioritise your communication actions: First things first followed by a broader approach. Make sure those who depend on the public meal are properly informed about the situation and its consequences. Make sure that catering companies on service contracts are informed about the contingency plans for food services of the municipality or city.

4. Keep in mind that in situations of crises, responsibilities may change and new stakeholders (e.g. immigration services or humanitarian aid organisations) may come to be important partners for meal provision. This must be included in the list of contacts.

[Strategic crisis communication and management for public meal provision - StratKIT Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit \(sustainable-public-meal.eu\)](https://sustainable-public-meal.eu)

[Communication and capacity building - StratKIT Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit \(sustainable-public-meal.eu\)](https://sustainable-public-meal.eu)

4 REFLECTING ABOUT CRISIS MANAGEMENT

4.1 Good practice for reflecting about the crisis management

Once a situation of crisis has been overcome and public meal provision has been resumed under normal or new conditions, it is time to reflect about the crisis. For those stakeholders involved in the provision of the public meal (procurement authority, kitchen, distributors and food providers) the reflection could cover these points:

- Timely action
- List of contacts
- Collaboration with known and new stakeholders
- Organisation of crisis management team or committee
- (Changed) responsibilities
- Communication
- Draw up experiences and recommendations for improvements
- Necessary updates to existing preparedness plans, flowcharts or stakeholder maps

It is encouraged to organize knowledge exchange actions with colleagues as well as stakeholder groups to reflect and discuss about learnings and good practices after a crisis. Knowledge exchange actions could be organized internally to reflect and improve of the practices undertaken by the

specific entity, e.g. a catering company or a municipality. Also, it is encouraged to organize knowledge exchange meetings that involve new stakeholders that have contributed during the situation of crisis. For knowledge exchange actions, it is important to discuss and reflect about interfaces, communication and responsibilities with the overall aim of highlighting vulnerabilities and action points to avoid the challenges experienced. Furthermore, new ideas that were introduced and trialed during the crisis may have proven successful and therefore relevant to include in an updated version of the baseline routines for public meal provision under normal conditions.

4.2 More resources: StratKIT network and toolkit

In addition to the Guide, an online toolkit is available on <https://www.sustainable-public-meal.eu/en/>. The toolkit offers a collection of easy-to-use tools to facilitate actions that could help sustain public meal provision in situations of crisis. The toolkit also offers a comprehensive range of tools designed to inspire procurement actions, communication and training actions, menu optimization, and collaboration with farmers and local suppliers with the overarching purpose of enhancing the sustainability of the public meal.

The Guide to prepare an Action Plan and the collection of tools for food crisis management have been developed during the Interreg BSR StratKit+ project (2022-2024) based on consultations with key stakeholders and experts from eight BSR countries.

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