

EXISTING WORKFORCE NUTRITION POLICIES IN ETHIOPIA AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT



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KEY MESSAGES

- People spend 1/3 of their adult lives at work. By leveraging the workplace as a connector to people, we can bring access to and knowledge about healthy nutrition to millions of people around the globe through **workforce nutrition**.
- The most important opportunities for expanding workforce nutrition policies include the mandate for **food provisioning with minimal nutritional standards**, ensuring that workers have **access to nutrition-focused health checks** and expanding of **maternity care regulations** for female workers in line with international standards.
- With supportive policies in place, even greater impact can be achieved when ensuring minimal **accountability** and **compliance mechanisms** against these policies.

SETTING THE SCENE

Malnutrition in all its forms, from undernutrition to micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition, is a global public health burden. It is estimated that 2 in 3 women of reproductive age are affected by nutrient deficiencies ¹. In Ethiopia, the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, locust invasion, and extreme weather events have negatively impacted food and nutrition security ². Besides, the burden of malnutrition is characterized by high rates of anaemia among women of reproductive rates (24%) and increasing rates of overweight among adult women (28%) and men (13%) ³. Never has there been a greater need to engage all actors and options to address the malnutrition burden the world faces. People spend one-third of their adult lives at work, therefore, by leveraging the workplace, access to and knowledge about healthy nutrition can be brought to millions of people around the globe. Workforce nutrition is an underutilised opportunity to deliver proven benefits for employers, workers and communities. A definition and framework for workforce nutrition can be found [here](#).

In recent years, Ethiopia has taken some critical steps to identify the role of employers in enabling good nutrition for workers and improving maternity entitlements, most notably in Strategic Objective 4 of the Food and Nutrition Security Policy of 2021. Further improved action in the policy arena could help start or scale up workforce nutrition programmes and contribute to addressing the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth).

WIN-WIN-WIN APPROACH

As elaborated in a GAIN evidence brief ⁴, poor-quality diets and insufficient food quantity are linked to reduced work capacity. This suggests that the malnutrition burden can be partly addressed through a win-win-win approach which improves individual lives, business outcomes, and national economies. Individual outcomes observed as a result of workforce nutrition programmes have included increased job satisfaction, reduced sick days, higher consumption of healthy foods, and increased duration of exclusive breastfeeding, amongst others. Business outcomes are reduced

¹ Stevens, G. A., Beal, T., Mbuya, M. N., Luo, H., Neufeld, L. M., Addo, O. Y., ... & Young, M. F. (2022). Micronutrient deficiencies among preschool-aged children and women of reproductive age worldwide: a pooled analysis of individual-level data from population-representative surveys. *The Lancet Global Health*, 10(11), e1590-e1599.

² Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) & World Food Programme (WFP) Monitoring Food Security in Countries with Conflict Situations. 2021.

³ Global Nutrition Report. Ethiopia. 2021. <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/africa/eastern-africa/ethiopia/>





⁴ Nyhus Dhillon, C. & Stone, G. The evidence for workforce nutrition programmes. 2019. <https://www.gainhealth.org/resources/reports-and-publications/evidence-workforce-nutrition-programmes>

absenteeism, enhanced productivity, reduced medical costs, and significantly lower rates of accidents and mistakes, which together could lead to an increase in the national GDP ⁵. Thus GAIN, as part of the **Workforce Nutrition Alliance**, urges Ethiopian regulators and policymakers to support employers by implementing public policies for improved workforce nutrition.

IMPROVING WORKFORCE NUTRITION-RELATED POLICIES

An outline of the four nutrition pillars for workforce nutrition and the related existing policies in Ethiopia is presented in Table 1. Based on an analysis of these policies, the table also provides opportunities to further employer-driven approaches to improve nutrition among formal worker populations. Even greater impact can be considered when expanding existing policies to include reaching workers in supply chains (as opposed to only those directly employed by the company) as well as establishing minimal accountability and reporting requirements against these policies.

Table 1: Existing policies and opportunities to further strengthen policies on workforce nutrition in Ethiopia for the different nutrition pillars, based on analysis of national labour and nutrition policies

Nutrition pillar	Existing workforce nutrition related policy components	Opportunities to further strengthen policies on workforce nutrition
<p>Healthy Food at Work</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provision of comprehensive and quality health, food and nutrition services for adults (20-49 years old) is identified as action area, with specific mention of workplaces to promote healthy lifestyle practices for adults ⁶. The need to improve the quality and coverage of nutrition services for pregnant women and lactating mothers and the nutritional status of people with non-communicable and lifestyle-related diseases is reflected in strategic objectives ⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish canteens to encourage provision of culturally acceptable and nutritious food at work based on Dietary Guidelines for Ethiopia ⁷. Ensure workers representation in a canteen management committee. Apply and specify minimal nutritional requirements with nutrition services in relevant policies. Incentivize employers to subsidize healthy meal options available at or near the workplace.
<p>Nutrition education</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need to formulate and enforce regulations that address healthy lifestyles to prevent Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) is reflected in strategic objectives ⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentivize employers and worksites to reinforce government mass media campaigns to the workers on healthy eating and good nutrition.
<p>Health Checks</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occupational health checks have been mandated for new workers and those in hazardous work environments ⁸. The provision of nutrition assessment and counselling services at the community and health facility level is reflected in strategic objectives ⁶ Health care insurance is accessible through the Social Health Insurance for formal workers⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require employers to cover the costs of annual and confidential diet-related health checks for workers beyond occupational health & safety. Require employers to cover the costs of nutrition counselling for workers (either to all workers or at least those at risk as identified by health checks). Ensure that pregnant workers have access to government provided additional health screening (i.a. antenatal check-ups) during working hours.
<p>Breastfeeding Support</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leave requires 120 days of maternity leave (30 days before childbirth). Pay is not specified ¹⁰. The need for extended maternity leave to six months is reflected in strategic objectives ¹¹. The establishment of a breastfeeding corner for lactating mothers in public and private sector workplaces and functional day-care centres (BFHI certified) is reflected in strategic objectives ¹⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extend maternity leave to 18 weeks as per International Labour Organization (ILO) recommendation 191 Expand standards for Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative certified centres to cover breastfeeding and day care facilities at public and private institutions. Include of nursing breaks/reduction of working hours for breastfeeding mothers. Strengthen adherence to maternity leave laws through a mix of incentives and proactive monitoring strategies. Require non-dismissal policy of women who announce their pregnancy through to at least 1 month post maternity leave.

⁵ Lambrechts, M. & B. Stacy. Increasing productivity and reducing vulnerable employment. Atlas of the Sustainable Development Goals. 2020. <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgoalatlas/goal-8-decent-work-and-economic-growth/>

⁶ Republic of Ethiopia National Food and Nutrition Strategy. 2021

⁷ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Health & Ethiopian Public Health Institute. (2022). Ethiopia: Food-based Dietary Guidelines.

⁸ Labour Proclamation No. 1156/2019. Section 177-182.

⁹ Labour Proclamation No. 690/2010. Section 50. A proclamation to provide for social health insurance.

¹⁰ Labour Proclamation No. 1156/2019. Section 88(3).

¹¹ National Food and Nutrition Policy. 2021.

A CALL TO ACTION

Ethiopia has taken some positive steps towards increasing good nutrition for workers and calling for workforce nutrition-friendly initiatives in its national strategic objectives. With growing emphasis of Export Processing Zones and general growth in the garments, textiles, agricultural industries, there is considerable scope for large-scale workforce nutrition interventions in Ethiopia. This calls for including novel workforce nutrition policies and refining existing policies that are in line with international standards. Policymakers should consider the mandate for food provisioning at or near the workplace and applying minimal nutritional standards to canteen offerings based on national Dietary Guidelines. In addition, female workers should have access to nutrition-related health checks and be supported by adequate maternity care regulations at work. Finally, even greater impact can be considered when expanding existing policies to include reaching workers in supply chains (as opposed to only those directly employed by the company) as well as ensuring minimal accountability and compliance mechanisms against these policies. When combined, these actions will contribute to healthier lives of citizens, improved commercial results and more stable labour relations.