

EXISTING WORKFORCE NUTRITION POLICIES IN COLOMBIA AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT



October 2022

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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**.
- Major opportunities to further expand workforce nutrition policies include **incentivizing and setting nutritional standards** for food provisioning at the workplace, as well as requiring nutrition-focused health checks to be part of **health surveillance** programmes.
- 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 Colombia, the Global Nutrition Report highlights the public health burden of malnutrition with the obesity prevalence estimated at 29% for adult women and 20% for adult men. At the same time, an estimated 20% of women of reproductive age suffer from anaemia ². Never has there been a greater need to engage all actors and options to address the malnutrition burden. 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 opportunity to deliver proven benefits to employers, workers, and communities. A definition and framework for workforce nutrition can be found [here](#).

In recent years, Colombia has taken some critical steps to upgrade Food-Based Dietary Guidelines and develop an information, communication, and education strategy in collaboration with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation ³. 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 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. **Therefore GAIN, as part of the Workforce Nutrition Alliance, urges Colombian regulators and policymakers to support employers by further developing and implementing public policies for improved workforce nutrition.**

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 Global Nutrition Report. Colombia. 2021. <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/latin-america-and-caribbean/south-america/colombia/>

³ Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF) & Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). (2020). *Guías Alimentarias Basadas en Alimentos para la población colombiana mayor de 2 años*





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

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/>

IMPROVING WORKFORCE NUTRITION RELATED POLICIES

An outline of the four nutrition pillars for workforce nutrition and the related existing policies in Colombia is presented in Table 1. Based on an analysis of these policies, the table also provides opportunities to further employer-driven approaches to improve the nutritional status of formal worker populations.

Table 1: Existing policies and opportunities to further strengthen policies on workforce nutrition in Colombia for the different nutrition themes, based on an analysis of the 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"> Employers can provide salary in kind in the form of food, room, or clothing as part of ordinary remuneration. It cannot exceed 30% of wages ⁶. In places of exploration and exploitation, petroleum companies must provide healthy and sufficient food or necessary salary to procure the same as per the prices in the region ⁷. The National Decadal Public Health Plan 2012-21 stresses that all Colombians should have access to and consume food in a permanent, timely manner, in sufficient quantity, variety, quality and safety ⁸. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandate employers, across more sectors, to apply minimal nutritional requirements to canteen offerings based on Dietary Guidelines for Colombia ³. Provide tax incentives for companies complying with the Heart Foundation of Colombia certification programmes (Existing Initiatives). Incentivise smaller employers to subsidise healthy meal options available at or near the workplace.
<p>Nutrition education</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct reference found under available laws/regulations. However, the National Decadal Public Health Plan 2012-21 stresses the promotion of health lifestyles is stressed, including “in organisations”. Section 7.8 suggests policies and interventions for promotion of healthy lifestyles, conditions and lifestyles in the workplace ⁸. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentivise employers and worksites to reinforce government mass media campaigns on healthy eating and good nutrition. Extend the existing scope of healthy lifestyle promotion to include basic nutritional education components across workplaces.
<p>Health Checks</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are mandatory provisions of First Aid and Medical Assistance in place for workers as a part of emergency assistance ⁹. Reference to the provision of subsidised and contributory insurance to formal workers and self-employed persons earning above a minimum salary. Oil companies and banana plantations are to provide doctors for workers and medical care to family members. The Mandatory Health Plan for pregnant women covers health services for prenatal care, birth, and the postpartum period.¹⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under the obligation of <i>Entidad Promotora de Salud</i>, extend health surveillance programmes to include basic nutritional health checks. Ensure that pregnant workers have access to the government-led Mandatory Health Plan with additional health services (i.a. antenatal check-ups) during working hours.
<p>Breastfeeding Support</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Law requires 18 weeks maternity leave with 2 weeks prior to birth. Premature and multiple deliveries have additional added weeks. Full pay provided during leave. Adoptive mothers and fathers have the right to same provisions and benefits as biological mothers ¹¹. Law requires 2 weeks of paid paternity leave and a shared parental leave concept has been added wherein the last 6 weeks of parental leave can be shared between the parents. Reference to a lactation room or appropriate place within or close to the facility. Law requires the provision of 2 breaks of 20 minutes in the workday for first 6 months after birth, without salary cut. In private companies with >50 employees, adopting the The Breastfeeding Family Friendly Rooms strategy in the Work Environment.¹² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentivise employers to provide breastfeeding sensitisation to managers and other staff. Require non-dismissal policy of women who announce their pregnancy through to at least 1 month post maternity leave.

⁶ Código Sustantivo del Trabajo. 1951. Salarios, Capítulo I, Artículo 129.

⁷ Código Sustantivo del Trabajo. 1951. Prestaciones patronales especiales, Capítulo VIII. Trabajadores de empresas de petróleos, Article 316.

⁸ Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social. Plan Decenal de Salud Pública (PDSP) 2012 -2021. La salud en Colombia la construyes tú. 2012.

⁹ Código Sustantivo del Trabajo. 1951. Prestaciones patronales communes, Capítulo II.

¹⁰ Ley 100. 1993. Libro II. Título I. Capítulo III. Artículo 166. Atención Materno Infantil.

¹¹ Ley 1822 de 2017. Artículo 1 & 2. Modifican los artículos 236 y 239, del código sustantivo del trabajo 1951.

¹² Ley 1823 de 2017.

EXISTING INITIATIVES FOR PROMOTING WORKFORCE NUTRITION

Programmes from the Fundación Colombiana del Corazón

- i) **Healthy Organisation Certification Program**¹: This programme was developed to encourage and support companies to improve their workers' quality of life and preserve their health. Among others, the programme incentivises a culture of learning to eat and a culture of medical checks. The programme provides learning and support material to companies and gives them the opportunity to get certified as Healthy Organizations.
- ii) **Quality distinction for healthy canteens at work**¹: Distinction is provided to companies and institutions that have a good service facility for their employees and comply with the requirements described in the Quality Distinctive Guide for Healthy Canteens. Companies applying for the certification are audited by an external party. Elements considered in a healthy canteen include:
 - Adapted to the nutritional needs of the population that demands the service.
 - Defined frequencies of foods and preparations, as well as nutritional synergies and organoleptic criteria.
 - Recipes to include costs, presentation, portions, raw materials, and nutritional contribution criteria
 - Canteen environment to become a learning experience, with food options that allow for promoting healthy decisions

A CALL TO ACTION

Colombia has taken several positive steps regarding workforce nutrition-friendly provisions across its labour and social welfare policies. Further refining and expanding existing policies to encourage minimal but broad workforce nutrition standards would help address the burden of malnutrition and associated non-communicable diseases. Essential considerations include 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, refinements should consider the extension of health surveillance programmes to include nutrition-focused health checks. 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.