Shaping the school environment to promote healthy diet and lifestyle habits

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Mission of the Joint Research Centre

- To provide **customer-driven scientific and technical support**
  - for conception, development, implementation and monitoring of EU policies

- As EC service, **JRC functions as EU reference centre of science and technology**

- Close to policy-making process, it **serves the common interest** of Member States, while being **independent** of private or national special interests
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EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity*

**Overarching goal**

- contribute to halting the rise in overweight and obesity in children and young people (0-18 years) by 2020

EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity

Areas for action

1. Support a healthy start in life;
2. Promote healthier environments, especially in schools and pre-schools;
3. Make the healthy option the easier option;
4. Restrict marketing and advertising to children;
5. Inform and empower families;
6. Encourage physical activity;
7. Monitor and evaluate;
8. Increase research.
Suggested actions (examples)

- Develop framework on preschool and school meals including distribution of fruit and vegetables and drinking milk

- Promote intake of tap water whilst reducing intake of sweetened beverages
  - e.g. by installing water fountains and assessing daily water intake compared to reference standard

- Develop signposting scheme promoting healthy options at preschools and schools
  - including healthier food/drinks in vending machines in (pre-)schools or restrictions on vending machine offers
School food policy mapping

http://dx.doi.org/10.2788/8214
Background and Objective

Background

• Both national and international strategy papers and policies highlight school setting as important for children to develop healthy diet and lifestyle habits

• European overview of school food policies would help researchers and policymakers alike in their respective work

Objective

• Describe current landscape of school food policies across EU28 plus Norway and Switzerland
Methodology

- **Identify most recent national policy documents** in relation to standards or guidelines for provision of food in (primary and secondary) schools
  - WHO NOPA, ministerial websites, original papers and reports
  - Support from HLG members, national dietitians

- **Systematically describe the content** of the respective policy
  - Based on SNIPE* questionnaire (developed by PHN Research)
  - Subset of mainly nutrition-related questions

- Analyse resulting matrix for **key commonalities and differences between countries** to possibly collate core elements characteristic of solid school food policy for Europe

*SNIPE = School Nutrition Index of Programme Effectiveness*
School food policies across the EU

- All MS have school food policies / guidelines / recommendations
- Mandatory school food standards in 18 out of 34 policies

EU28 plus Norway and Switzerland
What are the major policy objectives?

- Improve child nutrition: 97%
- Learn healthy habits: 94%
- Reduce/prevent obesity: 88%
- Reduce/prevent malnutrition: 65%
- Tackle health inequalities: 53%
- Improve attainment: 50%
- Support parents and local community: 29%
- Support local agriculture: 21%
- Support local economy: 15%
- Improve school attendance: 15%

% of school food policies that include the stated objective (EU28 + Norway and Switzerland)
Evaluation criteria? Which ones?

- Food provision at school: 56%
- Take up of school meals: 35%
- Nutrition of children: 29%
- Food consumption at school: 24%
- Financial viability of services: 15%
- Engagement of local farmers: 12%
- Support of local economy: 6%
- Reduction in health inequalities: 6%
- Authorized absence (e.g. sickness): 3%
- Attainment: 3%
- Unauthorised absence (e.g. truancy): 0%
- Attendance: 0%

% of school food policies that include the stated measure (EU28 + Norway and Switzerland)
Food-based standards

- Drinks limited to specific types: 82%
- Fresh drinking water: 79%
- F&V provision: 79%
- Soft drinks not allowed: 71%
- Sweet treats restricted: 68%
- Salt provision restricted: 79%
- (Deep-)fried/processed products restricted: 53%
- Frequency of serving dairy: 65%
- Crisps/savoury snacks restricted: 74%
- Frequency of serving (oily) fish: 59%
- Frequency of serving non-meat/non-dairy protein: 59%
- Starchy food cooked in fat/oil restricted: 53%
- Frequency of serving (red) meat: 53%

% of school food policies that include the stated food-based standard/guideline (EU28 + Norway and Switzerland)
Energy-/nutrient-based standards

- **Energy**: 47% (65% for lunch, 59% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Fat**: 44% (59% for lunch, 44% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Protein**: 26% (50% for lunch, 50% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Total CHO**: 29% (47% for lunch, 47% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Fibre**: 26% (44% for lunch, 44% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Vitamin C**: 29% (44% for lunch, 44% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Calcium**: 26% (44% for lunch, 44% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Iron**: 24% (44% for lunch, 44% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Sodium**: 29% (41% for lunch, 41% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Sugars**: 35% (41% for lunch, 41% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Saturated fat**: 29% (38% for lunch, 38% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Folate**: 24% (38% for lunch, 38% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Vitamin A**: 21% (32% for lunch, 32% for food other than lunchtime)
- **Zinc**: 21% (32% for lunch, 32% for food other than lunchtime)

% of school food policies that include the stated energy-/nutrient-based standard/guideline (EU28 + Norway and Switzerland)
Restrictions on vending machines on schools

- Vending machines banned or don't exist
- Certain foods/drinks not allowed
- Offer in line with healthy eating recommendations
- (More) healthful options promoted/recommended
- None

EU28 plus Norway and Switzerland
Restrictions on food/drink marketing in schools

- HFSS* foods/drinks plus generic restrictions
- HFSS food/drink restrictions only
- Only generic restrictions
- Generic restrictions plus positive aspects of marketing
- None

* = high-fat/-sugar/-salt

EU28 plus Norway and Switzerland
Is food/nutrition mandatory in school education?

EU28 plus Norway and Switzerland
Take home messages

- All 30 countries (EU-28 plus Norway and Switzerland) have school food policy in place
- Almost even split between voluntary guidelines and obligatory standards
- Countries differ in history and extent of providing food at school
- Our descriptive map of European school food policies can help policymakers facilitate exchange of experiences and support researchers in assessing impact on public health
- Individual country factsheets created to provide further detail
Country factsheets

- 34 factsheets

- More detail on food- and nutrient-based standards or guidelines, etc.

- Complemented with figures on school-age population and childhood overweight/obesity prevalence

School food policy workshop
4 workshop sessions

1. **Evidence of success**
   - What's working well? What data collected to prove it?
   - How were barriers overcome?

2. **Moving forward**
   - What can be done better? What measures not yet implemented, and why? Who can help to move agenda forward?

3. **Monitoring & evaluation**
   - Good indicators for effectiveness? What barriers to overcome? How to harmonise data collection?

4. **School food and beyond**
   - How to better use school setting? Other relevant issues?
Policy briefs on healthy eating and drinking behaviours
Policy briefs

Key characteristics

• address a policy issue

• mobilise relevant research evidence
  • about underlying problem(s), policy or programme options for addressing the policy issue and related implementation considerations

• bring together global research evidence (from systematic reviews) and local evidence to inform plans about health policies and programmes
Aims of our policy briefs

• **Policy brief on healthy eating**
  • Up-to-date overview of available strategies for promoting healthy eating in the medium-term and long-term in school-aged children

• **Policy brief on healthy fluid intake**
  • Up-to-date overview of available strategies to promote water intake in medium- and long-term in school-aged children
Public Health Policy Support: Nutrition

- visit us @ https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/research-topic/nutrition
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