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Second Policy Brief on the effects of implemented policies and policy outputs/D2.12

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Executive Summary

As part of the CO-CREATE project, World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) International is required to write policy briefs discussing the strength of implemented policies and policy outputs. These aim to support advocacy efforts to promote positive policy responses in the areas of healthy diets and physical activity. This is a report concerning the second deliverable regarding policy briefs (D2.12). For D2.12, two complementary policy briefs were prepared, presenting the results of two policy indexes, NOURISHING and MOVING, on nutrition and physical activity policy. Two policy briefs were prepared to present the findings of the two indexes in detail. They introduce the policy indexes, the CO-CREATE project and give an overview of the importance of nutrition and physical activity policy in the prevention of childhood and adolescent obesity. The policy briefs present an easy-to-read assessment of the policy status in 30 European countries across each policy area of the NOURISHING and MOVING frameworks, respectively. The briefs also include a comparative analysis on three main categories: a. which policy areas national government action was concentrated, b. policy areas where national governments in Europe took little to no action; and c. policy areas where national government took action, but implemented mostly poorly designed policies. Alongside the briefs, a breakdown of results for each country included was prepared (referred to as a country snapshot), designed to be used by stakeholders interested in policy advocacy in each country. The brief also included the policy analysis methodology, recommendations to key stakeholders, and a summary of recommendations to improve current policy status.

The development and validation of the policy briefs was an area of opportunity for engagement with country experts, including policymakers. The country snapshots were shared with country experts prior to publication and elicited high interest. As such, the delivery of the briefs is a first step in the further dissemination of the findings, first via two webinars in May 2023. Further dissemination opportunities will be considered during the remaining period of the project.

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List of acronyms / abbreviations

CO-CREATE	Confronting Obesity: Co-creating Policy with Youth project
EU	European Union
HBSC	WHO collaborative cross-national survey: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children
HFSS	High in fat, salt and/or sugar
MOVING	the MOVING Framework/database on physical activity policy actions
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
NOURISHING	the NOURISHING Framework/database on diet and nutrition policy actions
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
WCRF	World Cancer Research Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
WP	Work-package of the CO-CREATE project

Introduction

As part of the EU-funded project “Confronting Obesity: Co-creating policy with youth”, known as the “CO-CREATE” project, World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) International is responsible for deliverables in Work Package (WP) 2. As part of Deliverable 2.12 (D2.12), WCRF International has developed two policy briefs which compare the policy status of nutrition and physical activity policy in 30 European countries. These briefs aim to support advocacy efforts to promote positive policy responses in the areas of healthy diets and physical activity for youth.

This report discusses the briefs’ background, the process involved in developing the policy briefs, and outlines the findings, challenges and limitations.

Deliverable description

Deliverable 2.12 is the second policy brief on the effects of implemented policies and policy outputs. It is described as “final policy brief, summarizing the effects of implemented policies and policy outputs, including comparing and contrasting policy environments across Europe, using the developed policy index.”

Deliverable 2.12 forms part of Task 2.6 which involves the “analysis of impact of implemented policies in Europe”. The task requires WP2 (led by WCRF) to collaborate with WP3-WP7 and WP9 to create and deliver policy briefs based on analyses of the effects of implemented policies, packages of implemented policies, and national levels of overweight and obesity. The task also requires the creation of policy outputs which include the “policy status” of countries across Europe, to support advocacy efforts to promote appropriate policy responses in the areas of healthy diets and physical activity.

Objective of the deliverable

The objective of the policy briefs is to develop policy indexes to benchmark and assess the overall adolescent-relevant “policy status” of European countries in the areas of promoting healthy diets and physical activity.

Background

WCRF International has completed the development of a physical activity policy framework (the [MOVING framework](#)) (D2.1), has finalised a comprehensive European policy scan for diet and physical activity (D2.3), published two articles on the [challenges associated with conducting a global and a targeted in-depth European policy scan for diet and physical activity](#) (D2.4) and on [the development of benchmarking tools for nutrition and physical activity policy](#) (D2.9). WCRF International has also developed a policy benchmarking tool (D2.8) to assess individual policies to ascertain the overall ‘policy status’ of European countries regarding the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity, alongside a physical activity policy database and a web-platform (D2.5 and D2.6). We collaborated with The Norwegian Institute of Public Health (WP3) on [pilot testing the NOURISHING policy index in five European countries](#).

Deliverable 2.12 requires WCRF International to deliver policy briefs which rely on outputs from D2.3, D2.8, and D2.5 (under Task 2.3 and 2.5) as the information used in this brief builds directly off their results. Assessing the overall ‘policy status’ of European countries using the benchmarking tool to complete this policy brief has involved completing the policy scan (task 2.3) and benchmarking policies across 30 European countries (two datasets, one for nutrition and one for physical activity policy) alongside the briefs themselves.

Outlined below is further information on the deliverables used to develop this brief.

The Comprehensive European Scan (Task 2.3)

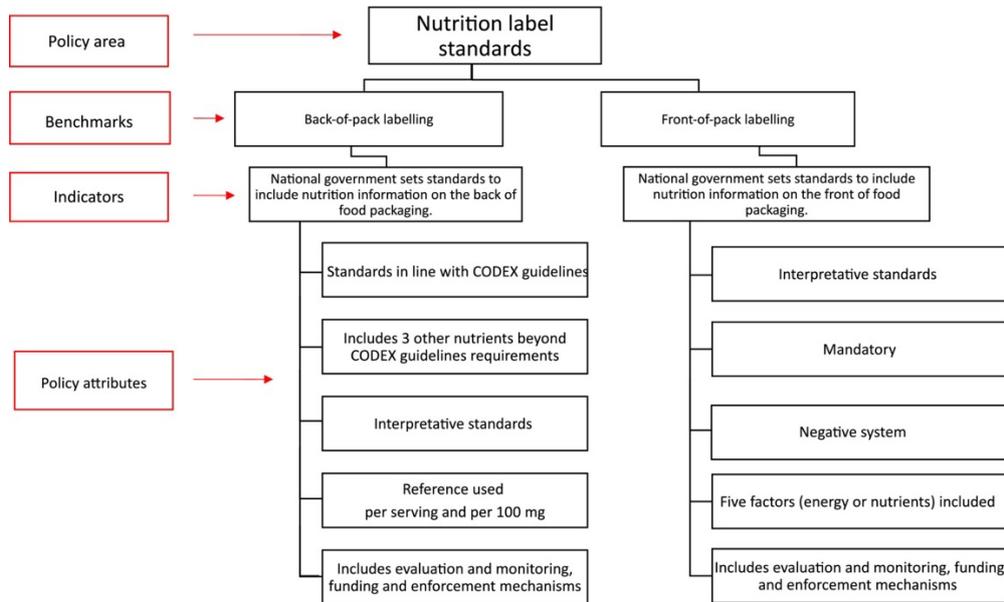
Task 2.3 involved performing a comprehensive policy scan for national-government physical activity and nutrition policy across European countries which are then added to the NOURISHING and new MOVING databases. The comprehensive policy scan included sourcing of policies (completed at the end of 2021) and verification of policies with in-country experts, identified with help from the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO EURO). The verification process included delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and low responsiveness with from government experts. The last country was verified in January 2023, whereas all the other countries were verified by September 2022. In total, 646 policy actions were identified for NOURISHING, and 835 policy actions identified for NOURISHING.

Policy benchmark and country indexes (Task 2.5)

The MOVING and NOURISHING policy benchmarks were developed to benchmark policies, giving an overall numerical score to show how strong the policy is. These benchmarks cover national-level physical activity (through MOVING) and nutrition (through NOURISHING) policies. The policy benchmarking tools was submitted to the European Commission in M16. The benchmarking tools are structured around the NOURISHING and MOVING policy areas, with each policy area having its own set of criteria.

Applying a benchmark involves scoring relevant policies against of set of aspirational criteria, listed as policy attributes, and associated attributes with a given score between 0-50. The final benchmark score is calculated as an average of the policy attributes.

Example of nutrition policy benchmarks for the policy area of nutrition labelling



In order to compare countries, a policy area score (0-100) is produced. Figure 2 outlines how the benchmark scores are used to produce the final policy area score.

Calculation of policy area (index) scores

→ **Benchmark score (0–100)** = Policy action presence (“no” = 0, “yes” = 50) + Average design attributes score (0–50)

→ **Policy area scores (0–100)** = Calculated average (mean) of benchmark scores for each policy area

Two papers were produced that outlines the development of the benchmarking tools (D2.9, submitted in M28), and the piloting of the policy index results. Both papers were included in the CO-CREATE Supplement, published in Feb 2023^{1,2}.

Collaboration among partners

The two briefs involved collaboration with a range of other WPs. In particular, the development of the benchmarking tools and the piloting of the policy index was the result of a close collaboration with WP3 (Norwegian Institute of Public Health). The benchmarking of policies in the NOURISHING and MOVING databases benefited from support of University of Cape Town (UCT). Finally, the dissemination of the policy briefs is being supported by WP9 (World Obesity Federation).

Description of activities

The following processes were undertaken to deliver the policy brief.

1. Data collection as part of a Comprehensive European Scan

The countries included in the Comprehensive European Scan (n=27) are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK.

During the comprehensive scan, it became apparent that the UK governance did not allow for identification of UK-wide only policies, as responsibility for national level policy making is shared between the UK government and home nations' governments (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales). Therefore, the policies for each home nation had to be collected, verified, benchmarked and compared in the policy index separately. Therefore, the policy briefs present the policy status of 30 European countries.

2. Production of policy index scores

A standardised policy index score (0–100) was set for each of the policy areas in the NOURISHING and MOVING frameworks and calculated in two subsequent steps. In the first step, the score for each benchmark was calculated by combining scores of the indicator for policy action presence (“no” = 0, “yes” = 50) and scores on the quality attributes of the policy action design (score on a 0–50 scale). Excel (version 2018) were used to analyse and present the 60 datasets (30 for NOURISHING, 30 for MOVING).

The results were presented as policy index scores for each policy areas in the NOURISHING and MOVING framework (ten and six, respectively). Since the scores are crude measures, they were categorized into four levels: Poor ($> 0 < 25$), Fair ($\geq 25 < 50$), Moderate ($\geq 50 < 75$) and Good ($\geq 75 \leq 100$). A score of 0 indicates that there are no policy actions in place within the respective policy area, and a score of 100 indicates that all aspirational attributes are met.

Categorisation of policy index scores

No policy	NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED
0-24	POOR
25-49	FAIR
50-74	MODERATE
75-99	GOOD
100	EXCELLENT

4. Policy areas were compared

The policy index results for each of the 30 countries are presented comparatively in a matrix. Below is an example of the matrix included in the NOURISHING policy brief.

NOURISHING policy index results

COUNTRY	N	O	U	R	I	S	H	I	N	G
Austria	Orange	Orange	Grey	Grey	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey	Red
Belgium	Yellow	Yellow	Grey	Red	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Grey	Orange
Bulgaria	Orange	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey	Grey
Croatia	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Yellow	Orange	Red
Czech Republic	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Red
Denmark	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Red	Green	Grey	Red	Green	Grey	Orange
England	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Orange	Orange
Estonia	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green	Orange	Orange
Finland	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Grey	Red	Green	Orange	Red
France	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Grey	Red	Green	Orange	Orange
Germany	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Grey	Yellow	Grey	Red	Green	Grey	Orange
Greece	Orange	Yellow	Red	Grey	Green	Grey	Grey	Green	Orange	Red
Hungary	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Red	Green	Grey	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey
Ireland	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green	Orange	Orange
Italy	Orange	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Grey	Grey	Yellow	Orange	Red
Latvia	Orange	Green	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Grey	Green	Orange	Yellow
Lithuania	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Red	Green	Grey	Red	Orange	Orange	Grey
Malta	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Grey	Red
Netherlands	Yellow	Yellow	Grey	Orange	Green	Red	Grey	Green	Green	Yellow
Northern Ireland	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Green	Red	Orange	Green	Green	Green
Norway	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Orange
Poland	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Yellow	Grey	Orange
Portugal	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Orange	Red	Green	Orange	Grey
Romania	Orange	Green	Orange	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Green	Green	Orange
Scotland	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Green	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Grey	Red
Slovakia	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Orange	Orange	Orange
Slovenia	Green	Yellow	Orange	Red	Yellow	Grey	Red	Yellow	Orange	Orange
Spain	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Green	Grey	Red	Green	Orange	Orange
Sweden	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Red	Grey	Grey	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange
Wales	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Green	Grey	Red	Green	Orange	Red



MOVING policy index results

COUNTRY	M	O	V	I	N	G
Austria	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Orange	Yellow	Red
Belgium	Green	Yellow	Red	Orange	Green	Orange
Bulgaria	Orange	Grey	Red	Red	Orange	Red
Croatia	Orange	Orange	Grey	Grey	Orange	Red
Czech Republic	Orange	Orange	Grey	Orange	Orange	Grey
Denmark	Green	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange
England	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange
Estonia	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Grey
Finland	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Green	Orange
France	Yellow	Green	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Red
Germany	Green	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
Greece	Yellow	Green	Red	Grey	Green	Red
Hungary	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Orange	Orange	Red
Ireland	Green	Green	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange
Italy	Yellow	Orange	Grey	Grey	Green	Red
Latvia	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Grey
Lithuania	Yellow	Green	Red	Orange	Green	Orange
Malta	Green	Grey	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey
Netherlands	Yellow	Orange	Red	Red	Orange	Red
Northern Ireland	Yellow	Grey	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange
Norway	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange
Poland	Green	Yellow	Red	Grey	Orange	Grey
Portugal	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green
Romania	Orange	Grey	Red	Red	Orange	Grey
Scotland	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange
Slovakia	Orange	Yellow	Red	Orange	Green	Orange
Slovenia	Orange	Orange	Red	Yellow	Orange	Orange
Spain	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Green	Orange
Sweden	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Red
Wales	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange

The results of the NOURISHING and MOVING policy indexes are analysed comparatively in each policy brief. The briefs also include for recommendations key target groups: policymakers, researchers and civil society, including youth groups. Finally, the briefs highlight how can countries improve current policies by using the aspirational policy design criteria used to assess policies and compare countries.

3. Country snapshots

The policy index results are presented comparatively in the policy briefs. However, it was considered that a closer look at the policy situation in each country would be important for key users engaged in policy advocacy at country level. As a result, 60 country snapshots were produced based on the benchmarking results. The design of these country snapshots included user testing with policy-makers from Austria, Germany and Italy, youth groups from Norway and the UK (external and internal to CO-CREATE) and researchers (members of the CO-CREATE consortium). The design of the country snapshots is highlighted below.



Physical activity policy status in France

MOVING policy index



This country snapshot presents detailed results of the **MOVING policy index** [1] for France. It highlights strengths and weaknesses in the design of government physical activity policies. This snapshot supplements the policy index results with an in-depth look at the quality of policy design. Full policy index results are outlined in the **MOVING policy brief** [2], which compares France to 29 other European countries.

Main messages

- France implements policy actions in all six areas of MOVING, with the highest policy area physical activity opportunities in the workplace and training (O) receiving an excellent assessment, for policies offering physical activity training for non-health professionals and physical activity opportunity in the workplace. This was followed by a moderate assessment for initiatives that promote physical activity in schools, community, and recreation (M), and increasing physical activity through public communication which builds behaviour change skills (N).
- Weaknesses were seen in policy areas targeting active environments, specifically design guidelines (V) and transport infrastructure (I). Active design guidelines outside of buildings and walking and cycling infrastructure (V). No national government policy actions were identified on design guidelines for buildings or active design guidelines for open and green spaces, for example (V).
- Much more needs to be done to improve healthcare and outpatient settings on physical activity (G), which received a poor assessment. National government action should be prioritised to implement policy actions in all areas of physical activity structures and surroundings which promote physical activity (V) and transport infrastructure to promote active societies (I), thus improving overall environments that enable physical activity.

Overview of policy status

NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED	POOR	FAIR	MODERATE	GOOD	EXCELLENT
M			MODERATE		
O				EXCELLENT	
V		FAIR			
I		FAIR			
N			MODERATE		
G	POOR				

This snapshot is based on national level policies only. Policies coming from the provincial, regional or local governments are outside the scope of this project.

Methods

The MOVING policy index methods are fully explained in the associated **policy brief** [2]. In short, the policy index combines values for policy presence and design across 23 benchmarks.

The benchmarks are applied to policies in the **MOVING database** [3], collected through a comprehensive scan in 30 European countries, including France.

FRAMEWORK: Set of comprehensive policy actions across 3 domains: ACTIVE SOCIETIES, ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS, ACTIVE PEOPLE.

DATABASE: Library of nutrition and diet-related policies.

POLICY INDEX: Compares country and policy area results generated by the benchmarking tool.

BENCHMARKING TOOL: Assesses the quality of policy design based on set criteria.

Policy tools used to produce the policy index results

Breakdown of policy index results

Physical activity policy status in France

✗ No policy identified	● Meets up to 75% of policy design criteria
● Meets up to 25% of policy design criteria	● Meets up to 90% of policy design criteria
● Meets up to 50% of policy design criteria	● Meets all policy design criteria

M	Physical activity in schools and PE	●
	Physical activity in and outside of classrooms	●
	Physical activity outside of school hours	✗
O	Community and mass participation initiatives	●
	Physical activity for people of all ages and abilities	●
	Financial incentives to promote physical activity	●
V	Training for professions outside of health care	●
	Physical activity in the workplace	●
	Design guidelines and regulations for buildings	✗
I	Active design guidelines outside buildings	●
	Active design guidelines for open/green spaces	✗
	Walking and cycling infrastructure	●
N	Integrated urban design and land-use policies	✗
	Access to quality public open space and green spaces	✗
	Policies to support public transport	●
G	Road safety actions including safety of pedestrians, cyclists etc	✗
	Mass communication campaigns to promote transport	✗
	Policies to promote active transport	●
G	Mass media campaigns and social marketing promoting physical activity	●
	Develop and communicate physical activity guidelines	●
	Pre- and in-service training within health care	✗
G	Primary care (assessment, counselling and PA prescriptions)	✗
	Health care and outpatient settings	●

Note: The policy landscape in any country evolves over time. These findings reflect our knowledge as of March 2023. To see latest results and for further technical information on the policy indexes, please consult our website: wcrf.org/our-policy-work. For feedback or suggested updates, please email policy@wcrf.org. More info in the CO-CREATE project can be found at co-create.eu

[1] Policy index (PDF): wcrf-uk.org/xxxxxxx [2] Policy brief: wcrf-uk.org/xxxxxxx [3] Policy database: policydatabase.wcrf.org




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The country snapshots were shared with the in-country experts that for validation. Out of the 60 country snapshots, 41 returned a response, with experts showing interest in these results. One expert from Estonia was very engaged and impressed with the results as the snapshot reflected the nutrition status in Estonia accurately. This resulted in a request for them to use the NOURISHING Estonia country snapshot at a Public Health Conference where key decision makers and stakeholders would discuss the results.

As part of this process, experts were able to send documentation of policies that had been implemented since the policy sourcing and verification concluded. These policies were only included if they met the inclusion criteria and appropriate evidence was provided (eg, a government webpage, or policy document).

8. WCRF International designed the brief

World Cancer Research Fund International designed the brief and the country snapshots to be clear, engaging, user friendly and suitable for a range of users including youth, policy makers, politicians and policy advocates. The brief and country snapshots are designed for online dissemination, with the possibility of adaptation for print.

Results

The attached documents:

[*NOURISHING policy index: Nutrition policy status in 30 European countries*](#)



MOVING policy index: Physical activity policy status in 30 European countries



MOVING policy index

Physical activity policy in 30 European countries



In collaboration with



May 2023

Discussion

Analysis of findings

The policy status in national government nutrition policy actions across Europe shows that:

- Countries are showing most action in: nutrition labelling, standards for healthy foods in public bodies and other settings, setting nutrient limits or targets for the improvement of the food products, and public awareness about food and nutrition.
- Countries are taking insufficient action in: using economic tools to address food affordability and purchase incentives, ensuring coherence between food supply chains and health, and setting incentives and rules to create a healthy retail and food service environment.
- Countries implemented poorly designed policies in: restricting food advertising and other forms of commercial promotion, nutrition advice and counselling in healthcare settings, and giving nutrition education and skills.

The policy status in national government physical activity policy actions across Europe shows that:

- Countries are receiving the best assessments in: promoting physical activity in schools and the wider community, offering physical activity opportunities in the workplace (and training in physical activity promotion across multiple professions), and public communication policies which build behaviour change skills.
- Countries are taking insufficient action in: the two MOVING policy areas that target the active environment, specifically structures and surroundings which promote physical activity and transport infrastructure.
- Countries have implemented poorly designed policies on: restricting food advertising and other forms of commercial physical activity training, assessment and counselling in healthcare settings, with little to no focus on training for healthcare professionals in this area.

Supporting policy advocacy

The brief is presented in a way that seeks to encourage and inspire co-creation activities to shape the policy environment.

This was done in a variety of ways. The brief provides a simple comparative view on the key policy areas where governments should take action to create environments that enable people to be physically active and eat a healthy diet. Each of these policy areas corresponds to several types of policy actions. Each of these actions are assessed for the quality of their design. By combining such complex information in easy to compare categories, the progress of each country can be easily shown at-a-glance, and understood in the context of policy progress across Europe.

The scorecard conveys a more in-depth assessment of the policy status in each country, which key users can draw on to inform and support in-country advocacy efforts.

As such, the policy briefs can be used by a range of stakeholders to advance national and European Union nutrition policies. Policymakers can utilise the policy design criteria to improve current

policies, in particular structural policies, identify gaps at national levels, and identify opportunities for action at local and regional level. Civil society, including youth groups, can identify weaknesses in the policy status. These weaknesses can inform advocacy efforts to improve the policy environments and impact the current and future rates of overweight and obesity. Researchers can compare high-scoring and lower-scoring countries to identify how existing policies can be improved to meet aspirational standards and identify where results could be supplemented by additional analyses at local level and in specific settings.

Challenges and limitations

Developing this policy brief came with a number of challenges, including delays due to the lengthy process of verifying policies, as well as the validation of the findings through the sharing of the country snapshots. The country snapshot feedback highlighted that some countries (particularly federal countries) devolve responsibilities for physical activity in particular to regional or local level. While this was a consideration when the benchmarking tools and the comprehensive scan were designed, it was not feasible with the resources available to carry out a scan for policies at all governance levels. Further, the benchmarking tools themselves had a series of limitations that had to be considered in the production of the brief.

First, during the benchmarking and consensus process, it was found that there were some differences in interpretation of certain questions. As a result, technical notes were needed to ensure all users had the same level of understanding.

Second, when undertaking the benchmarking process, further research on certain benchmarks was needed due to limited availability of information. In some cases, sufficient information could not be gathered. However, because the same attributes (eg, use of nutrient profile models in health-related food taxes and public information campaigns, setting intake targets for reformulation plans) were found to lead to difficulties in information gathering, it was judged that this was not an isolated case, therefore the missing data was spread across the 30 countries, rather than affecting one specific country in particular.

Third, during the data collection and verification phase, attributes related to implementation considerations, such as monitoring and evaluation, funding and enforcement plans being included in policy design, were found difficult to collect and verify from the in-country experts. This resulted in the exclusion of these attributes from the the policy index results due to inconsistencies in available data.

Fourth, one of the strengths of the tool is its ability to benchmark multiple policies under the same benchmark. Where multiple policies are under one benchmark the highest scoring policy will be chosen despite weaker policies existing for the same benchmark. For example, a country has 7 policies, 6 of which are voluntary and one of which is mandatory. Therefore, the benchmark will receive the score for mandatory as this carries a higher weighting in the benchmarking tool than voluntary action, despite the mandatory policy being in a minority. This approach disadvantages

countries who are consistent in implementing policy actions. However, it was judged that the policy index should acknowledge and reward when countries had implemented stronger policy actions such as legislation and regulations, even if not consistently.

Fifth, the number of benchmarks for each policy area were supported by evidence and extensive expert consultation used in the development of the NOURISHING benchmarking tool. However, because the number of benchmarks (and corresponding policy attributes) are not equally distributed, an overall NOURISHING policy index score could not be calculated. Instead, the policy areas scores are calculated and used to compare countries.

Conclusion

To conclude, the policy briefs were developed to highlight the results of the NOURISHING and MOVING policy indexes, which assess the overall policy status for nutrition and physical activity policy across 30 European countries. They aim to support advocacy efforts to promote positive policy responses in the areas of healthy diets and physical activity for key stakeholders, specifically policymakers, researchers and civil society, including youth. This report discussed the background of the briefs, the processes involved with their development and their limitations. The development of the briefs has been an invaluable tool for reviewing the results of the comprehensive European scan and the applying the benchmarking tools developed in the CO-CREATE project. It showed that key stakeholders, particularly policymakers are willing to engage with these results, thus fulfilling the important policy monitoring and accountability role of the policy indexes.

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Appendix -

NOURISHING policy index: Nutrition policy status in 30 European countries



NOURISHING policy index

Nutrition policy status in 30 European countries



In collaboration with



May 2023

NOURISHING policy index:

Nutrition policy status in 30 European countries

Executive summary

Government action to create environments where people find it easy to eat a healthy diet and be physically active is essential for the prevention of overweight and obesity among adolescents. This brief presents an overview of nutrition policy status at European level, based on benchmarking national government policies against the **NOURISHING benchmarking tool**.

The brief shows indexed results of 30 European countries, produced by rating countries based on the quality of their policy design across each policy area of the **NOURISHING framework**. It is accompanied by a complementary policy brief, focusing on physical activity policy (see **MOVING brief**).

Main findings

The majority of countries analysed do not take a comprehensive approach to nutrition policy by implementing policies in all ten areas of the **NOURISHING framework** (see more details on page 5).

Countries are showing most action in:

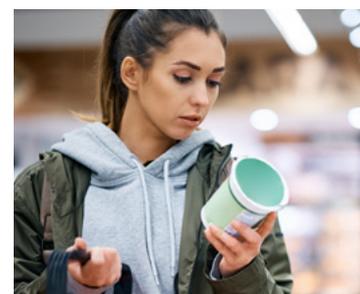
nutrition labelling (N), standards for healthy foods in public bodies and other settings (O), setting nutrient limits or targets for the improvement of the food products (I), and public awareness about food and nutrition (I).

Countries are taking insufficient action in:

using economic tools to address food affordability and purchase incentives (U), ensuring coherence between food supply chains and health (H), and setting incentives and rules to create a healthy retail and food service environment (S).

Countries are implementing poorly designed policies in:

restricting food advertising and other forms of commercial promotion (R), nutrition advice and counselling in healthcare settings (N), and giving nutrition education and skills (G).



The brief can be used by a range of stakeholders to advance national nutrition policies.

Policymakers can utilise the policy design criteria in the benchmarking tool to improve current policies (in particular structural policies), to identify gaps at national levels, and identify opportunities for action at local and regional level.

Civil society, including **youth groups**, can identify weaknesses in the policy status. These weaknesses can inform advocacy efforts to improve policy action by national governments and to lower the current and future rates of overweight and obesity.

Researchers can compare higher-scoring and lower-scoring countries to identify how existing policies can be improved to meet aspirational design standards (see details on page 12). They can also identify where results could be supplemented by additional analyses at local level and in specific settings.

Background

In Europe, overweight and obesity affects one in five adolescents. Fewer than one in five meet the WHO daily physical activity recommendations, and almost half (48%) eat no fruits or vegetables daily [1]. Nutrition [2] and physical activity [3] habits developed in adolescence continue into adulthood, making it vital that non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention starts with tackling unhealthy diets and promoting physical activity – two key factors for health – during early years, childhood, adolescence, and later in life.

Prevention is key: otherwise overweight and obesity is set to become the leading risk factor for cancer (surpassing smoking), while also being linked as a risk for other NCDs [4].

Government action to create enabling environments where people find it easy to eat a healthy diet and be physically active is essential for obesity prevention. To achieve this, more action and advocacy are needed to drive policy development and implementation.



Research conducted as part of the **CO-CREATE project** found that most obesity prevention strategies targeting adolescents focused on individual behaviour change and targeted

school settings [5]. This means we know little about structural policy measures that could change environments, and their impact on adolescent diet and physical activity [6]. Even when policies do not target adolescents directly, they are likely to have an impact on their health by shaping the environments where they live.

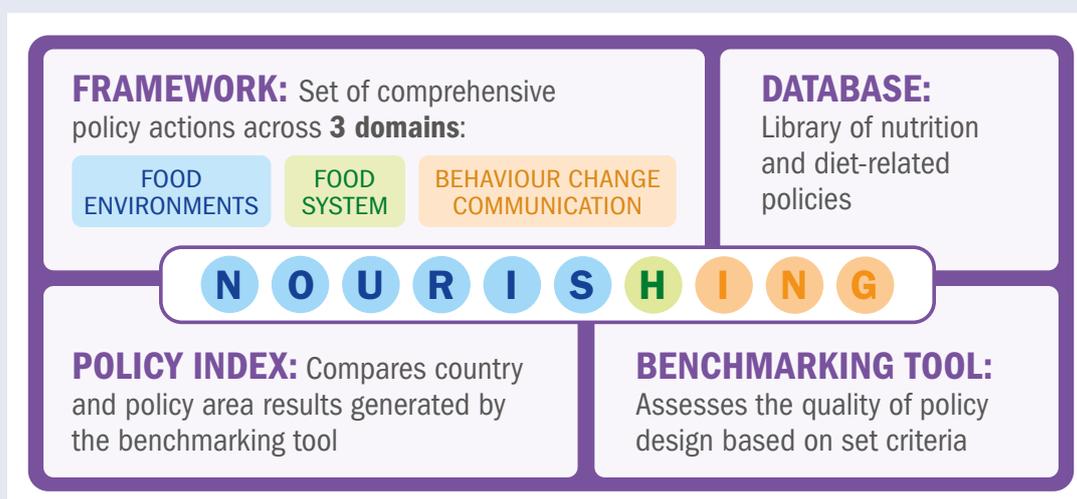
This policy brief focuses on nutrition policy and presents an overview of the status of national government policy actions in 30 European countries. It is produced by benchmarking policy actions from the **NOURISHING database** and accompanied by a complementary **MOVING policy brief** focusing on physical activity policy in the same countries.

Methods

The NOURISHING policy index is structured around the NOURISHING framework [7] and developed by applying the NOURISHING benchmarking tool. The policy index is one of a set of policy tools developed as part of the CO-CREATE project to monitor, benchmark and compare national government nutrition policies (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Policy tools for monitoring, benchmarking and comparing national government nutrition policies



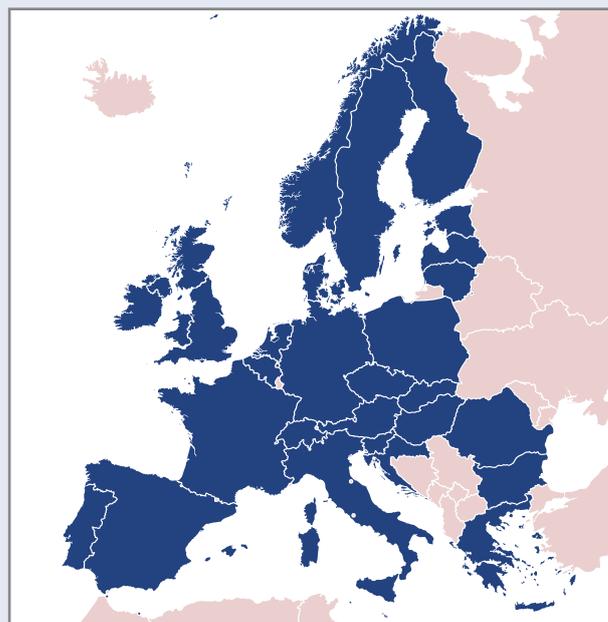
The NOURISHING benchmarking tool [8] was developed as part of the CO-CREATE project to assess national government policy actions with reference to aspirational standards. As current government action is insufficient, the benchmarking tool holds governments accountable to a higher, aspirational, standard rather than comparisons to current best practice. The tool includes 41 benchmarks (and associated indicators) across the ten policy areas of the NOURISHING framework.

The indicators are measured by two types of attributes: a) **one attribute for the existence of a policy action**, and b) **an associated set of policy attributes to assess the quality of design** of the policy actions.

The benchmarking tools were applied to national government policy actions collected via a comprehensive scan conducted for 30 European countries (see Figure 2). The inclusion criteria for countries chosen and the methods for the comprehensive scan are publicly available [9, 10] and briefly explained below. Policies from the 30 countries included were sourced through this comprehensive scan, and are publicly available in the **NOURISHING database**. These policies were used to generate the index results.

The comprehensive scan was carried out from 2019–2022 by World Cancer Research Fund International researchers. If the policy action identified met the inclusion criteria (see Box 1), its description was sent to country experts for verification. These experts were civil servants or researchers at national research institutes or universities, identified with support from the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO EURO). The results of the comprehensive scan are included in the NOURISHING database and can be downloaded and analysed freely.

Figure 2. Overview of the 30 European countries included in the NOURISHING policy index



Box 1. Inclusion criteria of policy actions in the NOURISHING database



→ **1. National level policy actions**

- European Union (EU) legislation and initiatives were also included where applicable, either as automatically applied (eg, EC regulation 1924/2006, on nutritional information) or after implementation by national governments (eg, the EU Fruit and Vegetables Scheme).



→ **2. Government policy actions**

- Implemented in partnership, supported, sponsored, or endorsed by the government.
- Programmes run by non-governmental actors were also included if endorsed by national governments. Voluntary schemes run by industry or non-governmental actors without government endorsement were not eligible.



→ **3. Implemented policy actions**

- In effect or enforced at the time of the scan (2019–2022).



→ **4. Sufficient information available**

- Information required: name of the policy action, implementation and/or publication date, and enough information to draft a policy description.

Benchmarking policies and producing index scores

The index results were produced in two stages:

- **Benchmark scores (0–100)** = Policy action presence (“no” = 0, “yes” = 50) + Average of design attributes scores (0–50)
- **Policy area scores (0–100)** = Calculated average (mean) of benchmark scores for each policy area

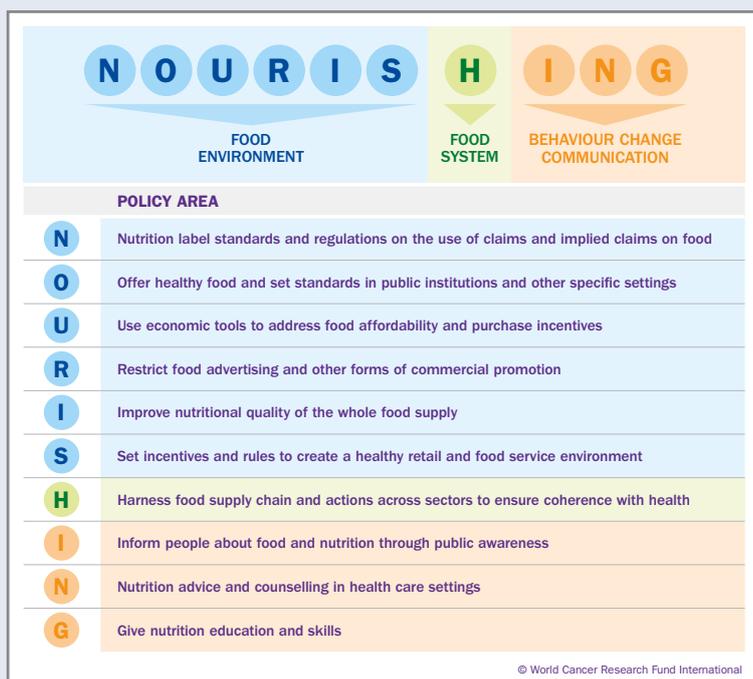
Detailed explanations on the development and application of the benchmarking tools are available [8]. An overall index score was not calculated because the number of benchmarks is not distributed equally across the policy areas.

Further, each benchmark is associated with a variable number of quality attributes. However, the distribution of benchmarks and design attributes is in line with existing evidence and was developed via extensive expert consultation [8].

The final policy area scores were grouped into five categories (see Box 2). A score of 0 indicates no policy actions are in place within the respective policy area, and a score of 100 indicates all aspirational attributes have been met.

Box 2. Categorisation of policy area scores for the NOURISHING policy index

No policy	NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED
1–24	POOR
25–49	FAIR
50–74	MODERATE
75–99	GOOD
100	EXCELLENT



The NOURISHING framework consists of ten key policy areas within three domains: **food environment**, **food system**, and **behaviour change communication** – which make up a comprehensive approach to nutrition policy.

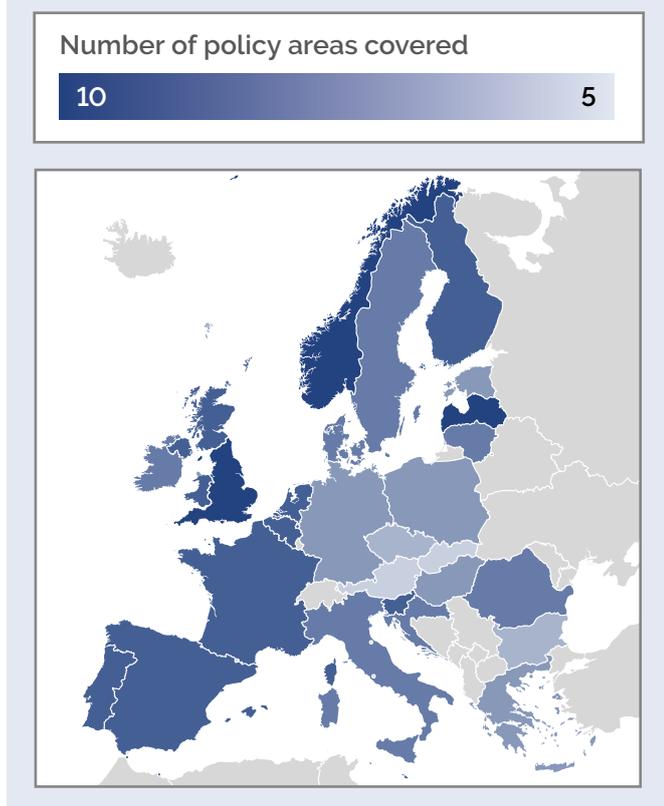
The NOURISHING policy index

The policy index results for the 30 countries are presented comparatively in Figure 3 and discussed below. In addition, 30 country snapshots were produced that supplement the policy index results with an in-depth look at the quality of policy design in each country. To consult the country snapshots, please visit our [website](#).

Figure 3. National government policy design in 30 European countries

COUNTRY	N	O	U	R	I	S	H	I	N	G
Austria	Orange	Orange	Grey	Grey	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey	Red
Belgium	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Red	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Grey	Orange
Bulgaria	Orange	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey	Grey
Croatia	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Yellow	Orange	Red
Czech Republic	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Red
Denmark	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Red	Green	Grey	Red	Green	Grey	Orange
England	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Orange	Orange
Estonia	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green	Orange	Orange
Finland	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Grey	Red	Green	Orange	Red
France	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Grey	Red	Green	Orange	Orange
Germany	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Grey	Yellow	Grey	Red	Green	Grey	Orange
Greece	Orange	Yellow	Red	Grey	Green	Grey	Grey	Green	Orange	Red
Hungary	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Grey	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey
Ireland	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Green	Orange	Orange
Italy	Orange	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Grey	Grey	Yellow	Orange	Red
Latvia	Orange	Green	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Green	Orange	Yellow
Lithuania	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Red	Green	Grey	Red	Orange	Orange	Grey
Malta	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Grey	Red
Netherlands	Orange	Yellow	Grey	Orange	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Yellow
Northern Ireland	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Green	Red	Orange	Green	Grey	Green
Norway	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Orange
Poland	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Yellow	Grey	Orange
Portugal	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Orange	Red	Green	Orange	Grey
Romania	Orange	Green	Orange	Red	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Green	Green	Orange
Scotland	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Green	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Grey	Red
Slovakia	Orange	Yellow	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey	Grey
Slovenia	Green	Yellow	Orange	Red	Yellow	Grey	Red	Yellow	Orange	Orange
Spain	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Green	Grey	Red	Green	Orange	Orange
Sweden	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Red	Grey	Grey	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange
Wales	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Green	Grey	Red	Green	Orange	Red

Figure 4. Overview of policy areas covered by national government policy action in the 30 European countries



This index assesses policies based on the quality of their design, not only on whether national governments have taken action across all the policy areas assessed. For example, looking at the three countries who have implemented policies across all ten policy areas of NOURISHING, we see they score fair or poor across 4/10 criteria (England and Norway) and 5/10 criteria (Latvia).

However, an overwhelming majority (n=27) of the countries analysed have not implemented policy actions across the ten policy areas of NOURISHING, and are therefore not taking a comprehensive approach to nutrition policy.

Eleven countries have implemented policies across nine of the NOURISHING policy areas, specifically Belgium, Finland, France, Malta, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain and Wales (see Figure 4).

Four countries, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Slovakia, take the least comprehensive approach, having implemented policy actions across a maximum of six policy areas only.

Where was national government action concentrated?

Four policy areas were assessed as having moderate or good policy design across most of the 30 countries: **nutrition labelling** **N**, **standards for healthy foods in public bodies and other settings** **O**, **nutrient limits or targets for the improvement of food products** **I**, and **public awareness about food and nutrition** **A**.

Three of those policy areas – nutrition labelling **N**, school food programmes **O**, and nutrient limits **I** – are subject to EU regulations. For example, three out of the five benchmarks under nutrition labelling **N** assessed EU regulations which, while not meeting all aspirational standards due to not utilising a nutrient profile model, give countries at least a moderate assessment for the policy area.

Similarly, for **nutrient limits or targets for the improvement of food products** **I**, Commission Regulation (EU) 2019/649, which came into force in 2021, sets a limit of 2 grams per 100 grams of industrially produced trans fats in food products placed on the EU market.

Furthermore, many countries use legislation to limit certain ingredients, such as salt, in specific food categories (eg, legislation in Portugal limiting salt content in bread). However, most policies implemented in this area constitute voluntary agreements with industry.



As the NOURISHING benchmarking tool assesses all such policies under the same benchmark, the scores in this policy area may be an overestimate. This is a limitation of the method, as a moderate or good assessment

does not constitute a guarantee that the entire food supply is uniformly covered by existing policy actions on all relevant ingredients or food categories.

All 30 countries have implemented **standards for healthy foods in public bodies and other settings**  and receive either a fair or moderate assessment for this policy area. The high assessments for this policy area are largely due to overall strong standards for food in schools and the effect of the EU Fruit and Vegetable Scheme, which many countries have implemented.



However, only one country implemented national standards on food in the immediate vicinity of school (Romania, in 2020) and only 12 countries implemented actions limiting sugar-sweetened beverage provision in schools. These are

important policy actions where countries should direct their focus. Where such policies may be considered the remit of regional, provincial or local government, national level guidelines can provide a unifying framework.

Finally, almost all countries (n=29) have implemented policy actions to **inform people about food and nutrition through public awareness** . Moreover, half of the countries received a good assessment for this policy area. Denmark was the only country to receive an excellent assessment, for dissemination of food-based dietary guidelines accompanied by explicit visual guidelines and other campaigns for healthy eating that were informed by a nutrient profile model, used social marketing principles, and were targeted at youth.

As shown by the concentrated action and good assessments, public awareness campaigns are a go-to for national government action. However, they are likely to have little impact on changing environments in the absence of structural policies.

Recommendations



Action in the immediate vicinity of schools and better coordination between national and local policies would enhance efforts to improve the food environments experienced by children and adolescents in schools.

Actions to date show the preference given by national governments to reformulation policies, but these should be expanded to a wider range of nutrients and food categories.

Further, in developing a proposal for an EU wide front-of-pack labelling system, the European Commission should look to adopt a mandatory, interpretive system that offers both positive and negative nutritional assessments.



Where was there least action from national governments?

Across the board, countries receive a consistent poor or fair assessment and major gaps in three out of the ten NOURISHING policy areas.

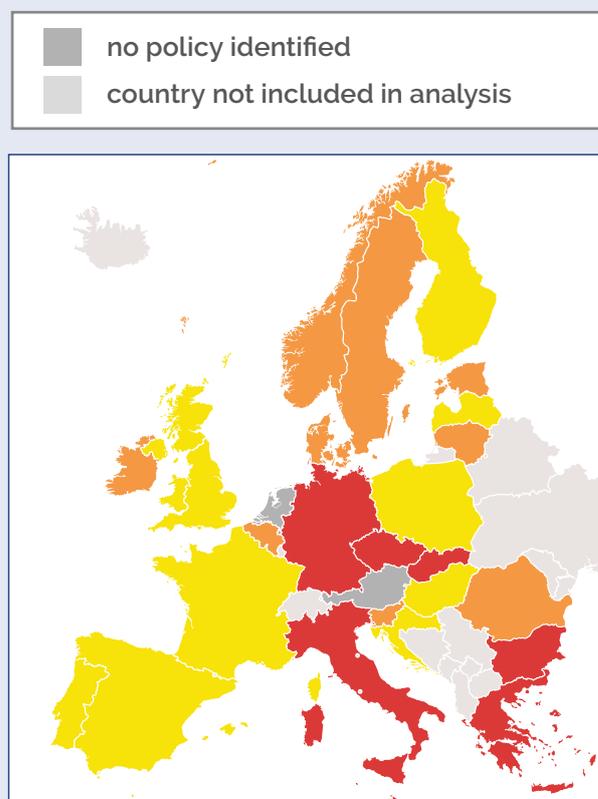
These are: **using economic tools to address food affordability and purchase incentives** **U**, **setting incentives and rules to create a healthy retail and food service environment** **S**, and **ensuring coherence between food supply chains and health** **H**. Notably, these are all policy areas that have a key role in changing environments by working at a systems level. The poor assessments received across these three policy areas highlight how policy actions (or lack thereof) can have an important, cumulative effect—as each of these three policy areas contain several recommended policy actions within them.

First, policy area **U** on using economic tools includes three types of economic policy actions: 1) health-related food taxes or tariffs; 2) income related subsidies or initiatives to increase affordability and accessibility of healthy food; and 3) targeted subsidies or initiatives to increase affordability and accessibility of healthy food.



The Soft Drinks Industry Levy implemented by the UK government in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, is recognised as a model among health-related food taxes. However, the Levy is not accompanied by well-designed income-related or targeted subsidies to increase affordability and accessibility of healthy food. It is not sufficient to take well-designed policy action across one of the three benchmarks in the policy area. Thus, because well-designed action was not taken across all three benchmarks within the policy area, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales receive only a moderate assessment for the entire policy area.

Figure 5. Overview of the status of government action on economic tools to address healthy food accessibility and purchase incentives **U**



Similarly, countries where health-related taxes are more poorly designed compared to the UK (for example, by including unjustified exemptions to the tax) receive a poor assessment for the same policy area (see Figure 5). Importantly, only 17 countries included in this analysis utilise health-related food taxes, which are powerful in shaping environments. In contrast, 24 countries have implemented targeted subsidies or initiatives to increase the accessibility of healthy foods, mostly through school meal programmes that offer free or subsidised meals.

Second, **policies on healthy retail and food service environments** **S** were not implemented in the majority of countries analysed. Only a third of countries had implemented policies in this area. Only England and Scotland implemented policies across all the three types of policy actions included in this policy area: planning restrictions regarding food service outlets in general, around schools, and initiatives to increase the availability of healthier food in food service outlets.

Third, policies that aim to ensure **coherence between food systems and health by targeting food supply chains** **H** have received the least attention from national governments. Among the policy actions within this policy area, 13 countries have implemented policies on procurement standards for public institutions, such as for schools or as part of social protection programmes (England, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Northern Ireland, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Slovenia). Eleven countries implemented policy actions on governance structures for multi-sectoral/stakeholder engagement (including Netherlands, Belgium, Malta, Finland, Latvia and Denmark).



Five countries implemented measures to support food producers to increase healthy food and decrease unhealthy food in the supply chain

(Latvia, Northern Ireland, Slovenia, Hungary and Denmark). Only one country (Northern Ireland) implemented measures to support food retailers to increase healthy food and decrease unhealthy food in the supply chain. No country implemented policy actions supporting urban agriculture in health and planning policies and encouraging community food production.

Recommendations



To further advance action in these policy areas, governments should implement a wide range of economic incentives to increase affordability and accessibility of healthy food. In addition, more attention to using supply chain actions to ensure coherence between food systems and health could be advantageous.

Improving the healthiness of retail environments provides an opportunity for national governments to work in collaboration with local governments.



Where was there most need for design improvement among implemented policies?

Three policy areas showed good overall action by national governments, but policies implemented received a poor or fair assessment: **restrict food advertising and other forms of commercial promotion** **R**, **nutrition advice and counselling in healthcare settings** **N** and **give nutrition education and skills** **G**. These are all important policy areas that target adolescents.

Food advertising policies (policy area **R**) were implemented in 27 out of the 30 countries included, and **nutrition education and skills policies** (policy area **G**) were implemented in 25 out of the 30 countries included. Lastly, policies on **nutrition advice and counselling in healthcare** **N** were implemented in 18 out of 30 countries. However, these policy areas received assessments that placed them mostly in the 'poor' or 'fair' category, meaning more action across constituent benchmarks and better policy design is needed.



Strengthening existing policies to **restrict food advertising and other forms of commercial promotion** **R** is necessary. Only one country (Norway) reaches a moderate

assessment for this policy area. Norway implements policies across five out of seven benchmarks within this area, including online and broadcast advertising, direct marketing, product placement, sponsorship and marketing in/around schools. However, existing policies should target children older than 13 to cover adolescents, which is a weakness of the policy. Further, gaps are identified in marketing to young people at point-of-sale and product packaging.

Nine countries receive a fair assessment for marketing and advertising to young people: England, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Spain and Wales. However, overall, almost two thirds of the countries analysed receive a poor assessment for the current status of policies to restrict marketing of unhealthy foods to young people.



Two examples of good policy design for **nutrition advice and counselling in healthcare settings** **N** could be found in the Netherlands and Norway. This is because these countries have implemented generally well-designed policies for nutrition advice and counselling in both primary care and in school healthcare. Most other countries that have implemented actions on this policy area received a fair assessment. The remaining 12 countries have not implemented policy action in this area, which shows an important gap.

Finally, for policies to **give nutrition education and skills** **G**. Only one good assessment was achieved, by Northern Ireland, followed by a moderate assessment to the Netherlands and Latvia. The good assessment is received for implementing policies not only on offering nutrition education on curricula, but also offering training for educators and caterers, and training on cooking skills and growing food.

Recommendations



Across Europe, urgent action is required to strengthen policies that restrict marketing and advertising of unhealthy foods to young people.

Working with the education and health sectors to ensure nutrition advice and counselling is offered in primary care and schools is also an area where more action is needed.

How can countries improve current policies?

Policy area	Countries scoring NO POLICY IDENTIFIED, POOR or FAIR	Policy design improvements* * For full recommendations, consult aspirational standards table wcrf.org/nutrition-benchmark
N Nutrition label standards and regulations on the use of claims and implied claims on food	15/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen regulations on back-of-pack labelling by targeting more relevant nutrients, and mandating use of a more informative reference (per 100gm and per serving). 2. Strengthen regulations on nutrient and health claims with a standard nutrient profile model. 3. Strengthen front of pack labelling with mandatory adoption of interpretative labelling, covering at least five factors.
O Offer healthy food and set standards in public institutions and other specific settings	9/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that school-based nutrition standards cover all food available on school premises, including beyond school hours, and target both primary and secondary schools. Include food within the immediate vicinity of schools (beyond 100 meters) in food standards. 2. Limit sugar-sweetened beverage provision in schools.
U Use economic tools to address food affordability and purchase incentives	18/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand coverage of health-related food taxes beyond sugar or sugary drinks. 2. Implement subsidies to increase accessibility and affordability of healthy foods that are based on nutrition standards.
R Restrict food advertising and other forms of commercial promotion	29/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure mandatory marketing regulations are in place, covering online and in/around schools, point of sale, sponsorship, product placement and product design and packaging. 2. The recommended age limit to effectively target adolescents is < less than 19 years old.
I Improve nutritional quality of the whole food supply	3/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce nutrient limits or targets for the improvement of the food products, covering at least four nutrients and food categories, and link these to intake targets.
S Set incentives and rules to create a healthy retail and food service environment	27/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce planning restrictions for food outlets, particularly around schools. 2. Enhance initiatives to increase availability of healthier food in stores and food service outlets.
H Harness supply chain and actions across sectors to ensure coherence with health	29/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce measures based on nutrition standards to support producers, manufacturers and retailers to increase healthy food and decrease unhealthy foods in the supply chain. 2. Introduce governance structures to facilitate policy coherence that include several government ministries, local and regional governments, and civil society. 3. Promote and support urban agriculture and community food production.
I Inform people about food and nutrition through public awareness	7/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve public awareness campaigns with the use of a nutrient profile model and social marketing principles in developing the campaigns, targeting specific groups such as adolescents in these.
N Nutrition advice and counselling in healthcare settings	27/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance nutrition advice and counselling in both primary care and in school healthcare with regulations, and appropriate targeting of specific groups (including children and adolescents with obesity-related issues).
G Give nutrition education and skills	28/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen nutrition education in schools and for specific professions by including nutrition education in the curricula which covers cooking skills and growing food. 2. Support nutrition education in schools with national regulations that target both primary and secondary schools for more the 5 hrs/week. 3. Introduce training of educators, health professionals and caterers in schools and other public settings.

Contextualising the policy index findings

This brief presents the status of national government policy action in nutrition across 30 European countries. It shows which countries have implemented well-designed policy actions for each of the ten policy areas of the NOURISHING framework, while also highlighting where there are gaps in action, and how to improve poorly designed policies according to the aspirational standards used in our assessment.

These results present a quality assessment of current action at national government level. As such, they cannot draw a causal link between the quality of policy design and any changes in the prevalence of overweight and obesity in the absence of repeat benchmarking. Further, they do not consider extent of implementation, or any action taken by regional, provincial or local governments.

When used in context, these findings need to be judged carefully against a situational assessment in each country. Some suggested questions to contextualise findings:

- **Are countries that have taken action across all areas of the NOURISHING framework doing so in response to a lack of enabling conditions for healthy behaviours?**
- **Conversely, will countries with an existing enabling environment for healthy behaviours be likely to take less action?**
 - Anecdotally, in Sweden, government contacts have indicated the national government has not taken action to limit sugar-sweetened beverage provision in schools because the practice of providing such beverages in schools is not widespread.
- **Do findings focused on national level actions miss current action at provincial, regional or local levels?**
 - Findings for countries with a federal governance arrangement (eg, Germany, Austria, Belgium) or with decentralised governance (eg, Spain, Italy) should be contextualised by considering provincial or regional action.
- **Among policies that are missing, which policies are likely to have most impact on preventing overweight and obesity?**
 - We know that structural, regulatory policies should be prioritised, as they are the most likely to impact environments, and reach people that need them most. These are least actioned by governments.
 - However, no single policy action is sufficient to effectively curb the rise in adolescent obesity, and action is necessary across multiple policy areas [4, 5].

Other questions to contextualise the findings are [available here](#).

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About Co-Create

Funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, CO-CREATE brought together 14 international research and advocacy organisations to work with young people to create, inform and promote policies for obesity prevention.
co-create.eu

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World Cancer Research Fund International is a leading authority on cancer prevention research related to diet, weight and physical activity.

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World Cancer Research Fund International is a not-for-profit organisation and part of an international network of cancer prevention charities. These charities are based in Europe and the Americas, along with representation in Asia, giving us a global voice to inform people about cancer prevention.



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MOVING policy index: Physical activity policy status in 30 European countries

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In collaboration with

MOVING policy index:

Physical activity policy status in 30 European countries

Executive summary

Government action to create environments where people find it easy to eat a healthy diet and be physically active is essential for the prevention of overweight and obesity among adolescents. This brief presents an overview of physical activity policy status at European level, based on benchmarking national government policies against the **MOVING benchmarking tool**.

The brief shows indexed results of 30 European countries, produced by rating countries based on the quality of their policy design across each policy area of the **MOVING framework**. It is accompanied by a complementary policy brief, focusing on nutrition policy (see **NOURISHING brief**).

Main findings

Just under two thirds of the countries analysed took a comprehensive approach to physical activity policy by implementing policies in all six areas of the MOVING framework (see more details on page 5).

Countries are showing most action in:

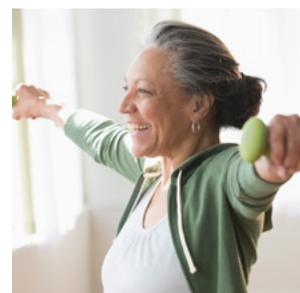
promoting physical activity in schools and the wider community (M), offering physical activity opportunities in the workplace (and training in physical activity promotion across multiple professions) (O), and public communication policies which build behaviour change skills (N).

Countries are taking insufficient action in:

the two MOVING policy areas that target the active environment, specifically structures and surroundings which promote physical activity (V), and transport infrastructure and opportunities that support active societies (I).

Countries are implementing poorly designed policies in:

physical activity training, assessment and counselling in healthcare settings (G), with little to no focus on training for healthcare professionals in this area.



The brief can be used by a range of stakeholders to advance national physical activity policies.

Policymakers can utilise the policy design criteria in the benchmarking tool to improve current policies (in particular structural policies), to identify gaps at national level, and to identify opportunities for action at local and regional level.

Civil society, including **youth groups**, can identify weaknesses in the policy status. These weaknesses can inform advocacy efforts to improve policy action by national governments and to lower the current and future rates of overweight and obesity.

Researchers can compare higher-scoring and lower-scoring countries to identify how existing policies can be improved to meet aspirational design standards (see details on page 12). They can also identify where results could be supplemented by additional analyses at local level and in specific settings.

Background

In Europe, overweight and obesity affects one in five adolescents. Fewer than one in five meet the WHO daily physical activity recommendations, and almost half (48%) eat no fruits or vegetables daily [1]. Nutrition [2] and physical activity [3] habits developed in adolescence continue into adulthood, making it vital that non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention starts with tackling unhealthy diets and promoting physical activity – two key factors for health – during early years, childhood, adolescence, and later in life.

Prevention is key: otherwise overweight and obesity is set to become the leading risk factor for cancer (surpassing smoking), while also being linked as a risk for other NCDs [4].

Government action to create enabling environments where people find it easy to eat a healthy diet and be physically active is essential for obesity prevention. To achieve this, more action and advocacy are needed to drive policy development and implementation.



Research conducted as part of the **CO-CREATE project** found that most obesity prevention strategies targeting adolescents focused on individual behaviour change and targeted

school settings [5]. This means we know little about structural policy measures that could change environments, and their impact on adolescent diet and physical activity [6]. Even when policies do not target adolescents directly, they are likely to have an impact on their health by shaping the environments where they live.

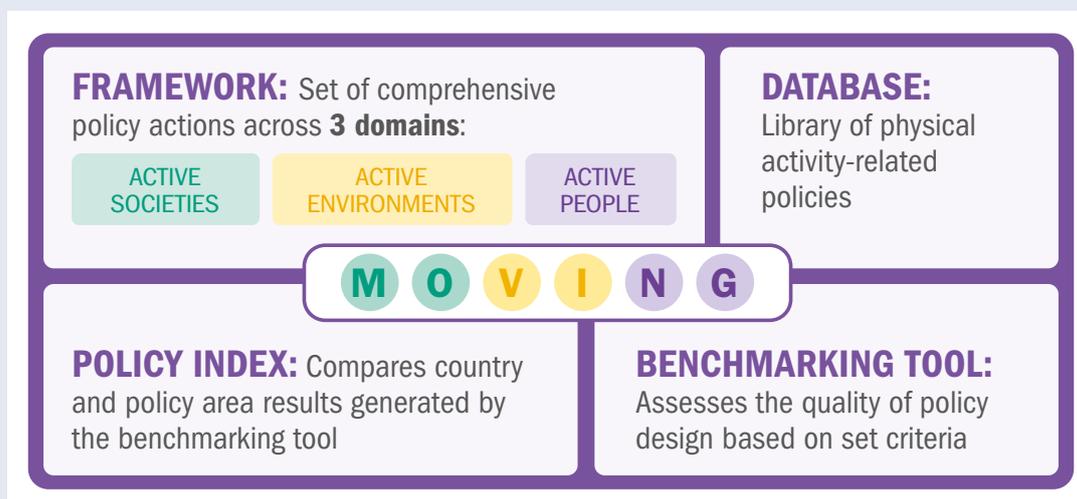
This policy brief focuses on physical activity policy and presents an overview of the status of national government policy actions in 30 European countries. It is produced by benchmarking policy actions from the **MOVING database** and is accompanied by a complementary **NOURISHING policy brief** focusing on nutrition in the same countries.

Methods

The MOVING policy index is structured around the MOVING framework [7] and developed by applying the MOVING benchmarking tool [8]. The policy index is one of a set of policy tools developed as part of the CO-CREATE project to monitor, benchmark and compare national government physical activity policies (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Policy tools for monitoring, benchmarking and comparing national government physical activity policies



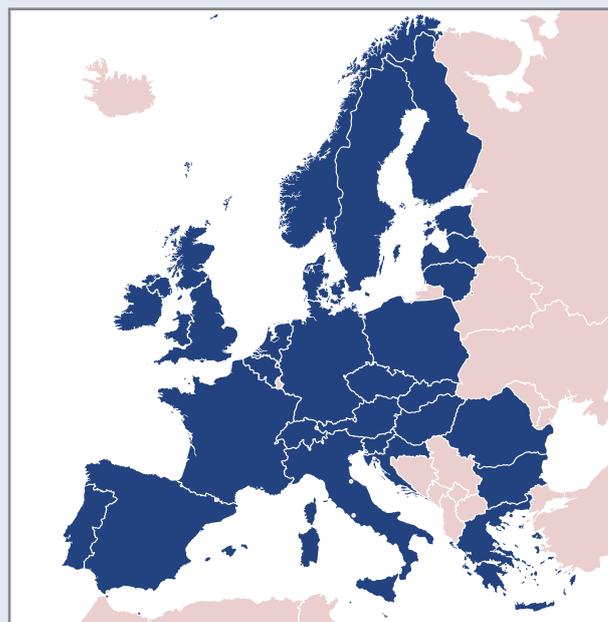
The MOVING benchmarking tool [8] was developed as part of the CO-CREATE project to assess national government policy actions with reference to aspirational standards. As current government action is insufficient, the benchmarking tool holds governments accountable to a higher, aspirational, standard rather than comparisons to current best practice. The tool includes 23 benchmarks (and associated indicators) across the six policy areas of the MOVING framework.

The indicators are measured by two types of attributes: a) **one attribute for the existence of a policy action**, and b) **an associated set of policy attributes to assess the quality of design of the policy actions**.

The benchmarking tools were applied to national government policy actions collected via a comprehensive scan conducted for 30 European countries (see Figure 2). The inclusion criteria for countries chosen and the methods for the comprehensive scan are publicly available [9, 10] and briefly explained below. Policies from the 30 countries included were sourced through this comprehensive scan, and are publicly available in the **MOVING database**. These policies were used to generate the index results.

The comprehensive scan was carried out between 2019–2022 by World Cancer Research Fund International researchers. If the policy actions identified met the inclusion criteria (see Box 1), its description was sent to country experts for verification. These experts were civil servants or researchers at national research institutes or universities, identified with support from the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The results of the comprehensive scan are included in the MOVING database and can be downloaded and analysed freely.

Figure 2. Overview of the 30 European countries included in the MOVING policy index



Box 1. Inclusion criteria of policy actions included in the MOVING database



→ **1. National level policy actions**

- For policy actions to be included they had to be implemented at a national level.



→ **2. Government policy actions**

- Implemented in partnership, supported, sponsored, or endorsed by the government.
- Programmes run by non-governmental actors were also included if endorsed by national governments. Voluntary schemes run by industry or non-governmental actors without government endorsement were not eligible.



→ **3. Implemented policy actions**

- In effect or enforced at the time of the scan (2019–2022).



→ **4. Sufficient information available**

- Information required: name of the policy action, implementation and/or publication date, and enough information to draft a policy description.

Benchmarking policies and producing index scores

The index results are produced in two stages:

- **Benchmark scores (0–100)** = Policy action presence (“no” = 0, “yes” = 50) + Average of design attributes scores (0–50)
- **Policy area scores (0–100)** = Calculated average (mean) of benchmark scores for each policy area

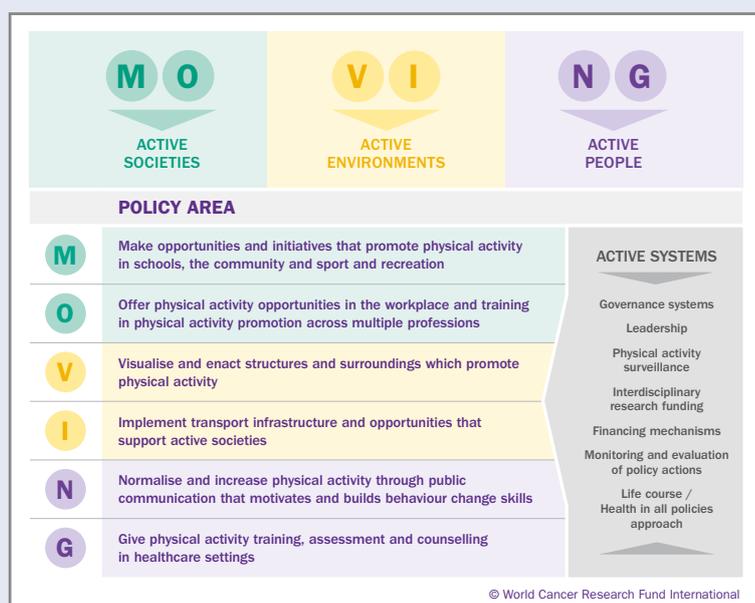
Detailed explanations on the development and application of the benchmarking tools are available [8]. An overall index score was not calculated because the number of benchmarks is not distributed equally across the policy areas.

Further, each benchmark is associated with a variable number of quality attributes. However, the distribution of benchmarks and design attributes is in line with existing evidence and was developed via extensive expert consultation [8].

The final policy area scores were grouped into five categories (see Box 2). A score of 0 indicates no policy actions are in place within the respective policy area, and a score of 100 indicates all aspirational attributes have been met.

Box 2. Categorisation of policy area scores for the MOVING policy index

No policy	NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED
1–24	POOR
25–49	FAIR
50–74	MODERATE
75–99	GOOD
100	EXCELLENT



The MOVING framework consists of six key policy areas within three domains: **active societies, active environments, and active people** – which make up a comprehensive approach to physical activity policy.

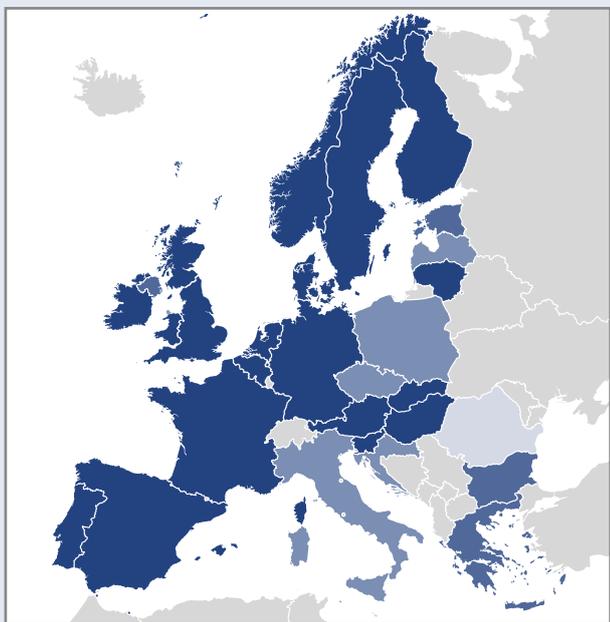
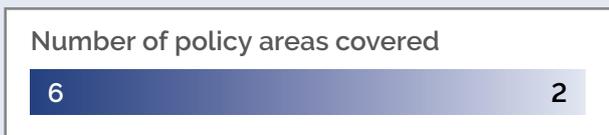
The MOVING policy index

The policy index results for the 30 countries are presented comparatively in Figure 3 and discussed below. In addition, 30 country snapshots were produced that supplement the policy index results with an in-depth look at the quality of policy design in each country. To consult the country snapshots, please visit our [website](#).

Figure 3. National government policy design in 30 European countries

COUNTRY	M	O	V	I	N	G
Austria	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Red
Belgium	Light Green	Yellow	Red	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Bulgaria	Orange	Grey	Red	Red	Orange	Red
Croatia	Yellow	Orange	Grey	Grey	Orange	Red
Czech Republic	Orange	Orange	Grey	Orange	Orange	Grey
Denmark	Light Green	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Light Green	Orange
England	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Estonia	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Grey
Finland	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Light Green	Orange
France	Yellow	Dark Green	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Red
Germany	Light Green	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
Greece	Yellow	Light Green	Red	Grey	Light Green	Red
Hungary	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Orange	Orange	Red
Ireland	Light Green	Light Green	Orange	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Italy	Yellow	Orange	Grey	Grey	Light Green	Red
Latvia	Orange	Orange	Red	Grey	Orange	Grey
Lithuania	Yellow	Light Green	Red	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Malta	Light Green	Grey	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey
Netherlands	Yellow	Light Green	Orange	Red	Orange	Red
Northern Ireland	Yellow	Grey	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange
Norway	Yellow	Light Green	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange
Poland	Light Green	Yellow	Red	Grey	Orange	Grey
Portugal	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Orange	Yellow	Light Green
Romania	Orange	Grey	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey
Scotland	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange
Slovakia	Orange	Yellow	Red	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Slovenia	Orange	Orange	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
Spain	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Orange	Light Green	Orange
Sweden	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Red
Wales	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange

Figure 4: Overview of policy areas covered by national government policy action in the 30 European countries



Of the 30 countries analysed, 19 countries took a comprehensive approach to physical activity policy meaning they implemented physical activity policy actions in all policy areas of the MOVING framework.

However, the primary consideration in the index is the quality of the policies implemented. Most assessments across the MOVING index are poor, fair or moderate. These are based on the quality of the design of policies implemented.

Most good assessments (n=10) were achieved by the policy area that targets **public communication policies which build behaviour change skills** **N**. This was followed by the policy area on **physical activity in the workplace and training for non-healthcare professionals** **O**, where Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Norway received a good assessment.



One country – France – achieved an excellent assessment, due to policies on physical activity in the workplace and training for non-health professionals supported by legislation and regulations. On average, policy assessments across the remaining countries received a fair assessment.

The Czech Republic, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Poland and Romania took the least comprehensive approach by implementing policy actions in four or less policy areas across the MOVING framework. All seven countries had policies implemented in **promoting physical activity in schools and wider community** **M** and **public communication policies which build behaviour change skills** **N**. No policy actions were identified in the **built environment** **V** and **transport infrastructure** **I** for Croatia, Italy, Malta and Romania.



Where was national government action concentrated?

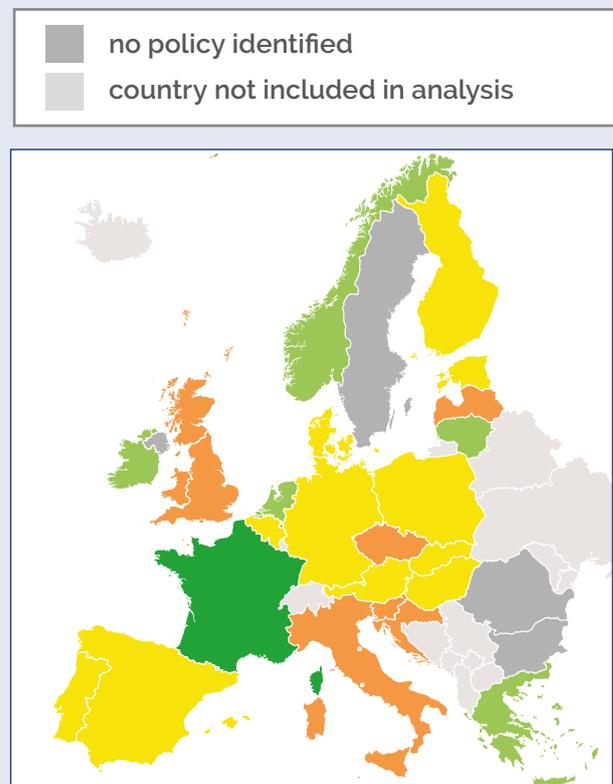
Three policy areas were covered by a majority of countries and received at least a fair assessment across countries: **promoting physical activity in schools and the wider community** **M**, **public communication policies which build behaviour change skills** **N**, and **offering physical activity opportunities in the workplace and training in physical activity promotion across multiple professions** **O**.

First, all countries have taken action in **promoting physical activity in schools and the wider community** **M**. However, a majority of the countries (n= 16) received a moderate assessment. Only six countries, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Malta and Poland, received a good assessment in this area. This is due to national government taking action across all benchmarks, which include physical activity in and outside of classrooms and school hours, community and participation initiatives that target people of all ages and abilities, as well as financial incentives to promote physical activity.

Second, under half the countries received a good assessment in **public communication policies which build behaviour change skills** **N**. Those were the countries that adopted physical activity guidelines that were also accompanied by well-designed public awareness campaigns, specifically those that use social marketing, focus on inactive population segments and that point to services or environmental changes to support behaviour change. The remaining countries received either a fair (n=13) or moderate (n=7) assessment. Thus, although implementation was strong across the 30 countries analysed, improvements are needed in policy design for more than half the countries.

Third, 25 countries implemented policies focusing on offering **physical activity opportunities in the workplace and training in physical activity promotion across multiple professions** **O**. Out of these, only France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Norway received a good assessment, meaning they implemented policies focused on the workplace, as well as training for relevant professions outside of healthcare.

Figure 5. Overview of the status of physical activity opportunities in the workplace and training in physical activity promotion across multiple professions **O**



Recommendations



Action to date shows that countries have focused on public awareness and on behaviour change skills. Well-designed policies in this area should include both physical activity guidelines and well-designed public awareness campaigns.

Action across all areas of physical activity promotion in schools and the community is needed, including physical activity outside of school hours, and physical activity for people of all ages and abilities.

Lastly, national governments should ensure that they put in place national policy action supporting physical activity in the workplace and training in physical activity promotion for professions outside of healthcare.

Where was there least action from national governments or poor policy design?

National governments have implemented policies that received mostly poor or fair assessments in the two MOVING policy areas that target the active environment, specifically **structures and surroundings which promote physical activity** **V** and **transport infrastructure and opportunities that support active societies** **I**. Gaps in action for these policy areas were also identified: out of the 30 countries analysed, five did not implement any policy actions on structures and surroundings which promote physical activity and seven had no action for transport infrastructure.

Of the 24 countries which implemented a policy action within **structures and surroundings which promote physical activity** **V**, most (n=13) received a poor assessment. Norway was the only country to be assessed as moderate. Norway received this assessment because it had implemented policies on all but one relevant policy action, specifically design guidelines and regulations for buildings. The implemented policy actions referred to active design guidelines outside buildings, for open/green spaces, walking and cycling infrastructure, integrated urban design and land-use policies, and policies to ensure access to quality public open space and green spaces.



For this policy area, structures and surroundings which promote physical activity, national government action was concentrated on walking and cycling infrastructure,

implemented by 19 countries. In contrast, the least action from national governments was on integrated urban design and land use policies, where only the Norwegian national government had taken action.

Most of the countries that implemented policies on **transport infrastructure and active travel** **I** received a fair assessment (n=15). Four countries, Finland, Germany, Norway, and Slovenia received a moderate assessment, as these four countries

implemented policies to support public transport, road safety actions, policies to promote active transport and mass communication campaigns on active transport.

Importantly, nine countries did not have policy actions implemented in either structures and surroundings which promote physical activity or transport infrastructure, with four of those countries (Croatia, Italy, Malta and Romania) having no policy actions implemented across either policy area.

A third policy area, **physical activity training, assessment and counselling in healthcare settings** **G**, received only poor or fair assessments for the 24 countries that took action at national government level. Most countries that did take action implemented actions on physical activity assessment, counselling or prescriptions in primary care. Only four countries (Belgium, France, Ireland and Portugal) offered physical activity counselling in outpatient settings and ten included physical activity training for healthcare professionals in their national policies. Portugal was the only country that achieved a good assessment in this area, by implementing well-designed policies across all three of these policy actions (primary care, outpatient settings and training for healthcare professionals in physical activity promotion).

Recommendations



National governments should prioritise policy actions which target the built environment and transport infrastructure including public and active transport. Taken together, these policy areas are key in creating active environments where physical activity is the easiest option.

National governments should improve the quality of training in physical activity for healthcare professionals to support existing policies on offering physical activity assessment, counselling or prescription.

How can countries improve current policies?

Policy area	Countries with NO POLICY IDENTIFIED or scoring POOR or FAIR	Policy design improvements* * For full recommendations, consult aspirational standards table wcrf.org/physical-activity-benchmark
M Physical activity in schools, the community and sport, and recreation	8/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure mandatory inclusion of physical activity in and outside of the classroom and beyond school hours in both primary and secondary school children. 2. Develop legislation on financial incentives which promotes physical activity in adolescents, people of all abilities and least active groups. 3. Support community level and mass participation initiatives which target adolescents, people of all abilities and least active groups to promote physical activity.
O Physical activity in the workplace and training for multiple professions	13/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop regulations on the inclusion and promotion of physical activity in the workplace. 2. Ensure mandatory training in physical activity for more than one non-healthcare professional which are based on competency-based standards.
V Structures and surroundings which promote physical activity	29/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure regulation surrounding building design guidelines which encourages physical activity. 2. Develop legislation and regulations on active design guidelines for in and outside buildings, open and green spaces, walking and cycling infrastructure, and urban design and land-use that encourage physical activity. 3. These regulations should target groups such as adolescents, people of all abilities and least active groups.
I Transport infrastructure and active societies	26/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop regulations to increase the provision of public transport and to promote active transport that also target adolescents, people of all abilities and least active groups. 2. Strengthen public information campaigns which increase awareness about road safety, promote the use of public transport and active transport focusing on key target groups such as inactive populations, and those classified as vulnerable or marginalised. 3. Develop regulations that promote active transport, including to and from primary and secondary schools and work.
N Public communication	13/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen mass communication campaigns to promote physical activity by including social marketing and signposting to more services or information such as policy actions, programs, or environmental changes to support the behaviours targeted. 2. The target group of the mass communication campaigns should be the inactive populations, and those classified as vulnerable or marginalised. 3. Physical activity guidelines should target children and adolescents and be disseminated through mass communication campaigns targeting these populations.
G Physical activity training, assessment and counselling in healthcare settings	29/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure mandatory physical activity training for more than one type of healthcare professionals which are based on competency-based standards. 2. Develop regulations on physical activity counselling, assessment, and physical activity prescription, and ensure that these take a specific focus on children and adolescents with obesity related issues.

Contextualising the policy index findings

This brief presents the status of national government policy action in physical activity across 30 European countries. It shows which countries have implemented well-designed policy actions for each of the six policy areas of the MOVING framework, while also highlighting where there are gaps in action, and how to improve poorly designed policies according to the aspirational standards used in our assessment.

These results present a quality assessment of current action at national government level. As such, they cannot draw a causal link between the quality of policy design and any changes in the prevalence of overweight and obesity, in the absence of repeat benchmarking. Further, they do not consider extent of implementation, or any action taken by regional, provincial or local governments.

When used in context, these findings need to be judged carefully against a situational assessment in each country. Some suggested questions to contextualise findings:

- **Are countries that have taken action across all areas of the MOVING framework doing so in response to a lack of enabling conditions for physical activity?**
- **Conversely, will countries with an existing enabling environment for physical activity be likely to take less action?**
- **Do findings focused on national level actions miss current action at provincial, regional or local levels?**
 - Findings for countries with a federal governance arrangement (eg, Germany, Austria, Belgium) or with decentralised governance (eg, Spain, Italy) should be contextualised by considering provincial or regional action.
- **What national policy actions can be complemented by action at local government level?**
 - Action in physical activity promotion is often the remit of regional or local governments. Thus, the results of this index, which focus on national government policy action, should be considered in the context of analyses at regional or local levels.
- **Among policies that are missing, which policies are likely to have most impact on preventing overweight and obesity?**
 - We know that structural, regulatory policies should be prioritised, as they are the most likely to impact environments, and reach people that need them most. These are also least actioned by governments.
 - However, no single policy action is sufficient to effectively curb the rise in adolescent obesity, and action is necessary across multiple policy areas [4, 5].

Other questions to contextualise the findings are [available here](#).

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About Co-Create

Funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, CO-CREATE brought together 14 international research and advocacy organisations to work with young people to create, inform and promote policies for obesity prevention. co-create.eu

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World Cancer Research Fund International is a leading authority on cancer prevention research related to diet, weight and physical activity.

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