Transforming food systems for health in Europe: relevance and importance for WHO’s work

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Transforming food systems will contribute to the goals relating to *all* forms of malnutrition and preventing diet-related NCDs

- A **25%** relative reduction in risk of premature mortality from CVD, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory diseases by **2025**
- A **0%** increase in diabetes and obesity by **2025**
- A **30%** reduction in sodium/salt intake by **2025**
- **No increase** in childhood overweight by **2025**
- By **2030** end all forms of malnutrition

Through:

Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches

Tackling inequities and the social determinants of health
Currently a concerning backdrop

Overweight prevalence among boys by age group and country*

* All data from 2012-13 round but those of Sweden (2007-8) and Hungary (2010-2011). Data from Greece and Lithuania are preliminary.
Driven by unhealthy food environments: example of sugar content of common foods

Source: Action on Sugar; Data EuroFIR, edited by Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM).
Factors influencing obesity and dietary behaviour multiple and require cross-sector and lifecourse thinking.
### Priority policy options

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<tr>
<th>Priority policy options</th>
<th>Objective</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strong controls on marketing, incl. but not limited to TV advertising</td>
<td>Reduce exposure of children to marketing of HFSS foods</td>
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<td>Fiscal measures and price policies</td>
<td>Explore policies that affect the price of foods for consumers at point of purchase &amp; create incentives to improve nutritional quality of food supply</td>
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<td>Consumer-friendly front of pack labelling</td>
<td>Identify foods for which consumption should be limited or promoted through interpretative labelling; encourage product reformulation</td>
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<td>Reformulation, calorie reduction, smaller portions</td>
<td>Stimulate reformulation of food products to improve nutritional composition; regulate the use of specific harmful ingredients (e.g. iTFAs); incentivize smaller portion sizes to prevent over-consumption</td>
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<td>Healthier food retail environment, incl. in schools</td>
<td>Improve availability &amp; affordability of healthier food products, through strategic purchasing/procurement, in-store product location and promotion. Introduce school food policies, including food-based standards &amp; restrictions on vending machines.</td>
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Implementation requires action by many sectors.

**HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS SUPPORT HEALTHY FOOD PREFERENCES?**

The food system is an interconnected network of producers, industry, and institutions. But at its heart is the individual. Policy can affect all parts of the network, influencing a cultural shift towards healthier food preferences.

1. **GOVERNMENTS**
   - Restrict marketing to children
   - Set food standards in schools
   - Tax unhealthy foods
   - Provide healthy eating education

2. **FOOD PRODUCERS**
   - Invest in infrastructure for producing healthier foods
   - Reformulation of products to reduce unhealthy ingredients
   - Change in demand for healthier choices
   - Increased shelf-space for healthier foods

3. **SCHOOLS**
   - Incentivise healthy food retailers to enter low income areas
   - Provide healthy foods to children
   - Regulate to prevent positioning unhealthy food outlets where children gather
   - Provide healthy eating education

4. **INDIVIDUALS**
   - Influence each other as role models, caregivers and peers
   - Redesign the choices available at point of sale and increase the availability of healthy options

5. **RETAILERS**
   - Increased demand for healthier choices

Applying a multi-sector lense

- Understanding which sectors influence diets and levels of physical activity
- Understanding what is amenable to change and what different sectors can do
- Identifying policy options available
- Exploring the feasibility and effectiveness of different options
“Strengthen coordinated action at different administrative levels and across government departments to ensure coherence among all policies that influence food systems and the food supply”

“Coherent and innovative actions covering the entire food system – from inputs and production, through processing, storage, transport and retailing to consumption – are needed to ensure access to sustainable, healthy diets for all”
A call echoed by Member States at the EU level
Case study on food production – how can it influence our eating behaviours?

“[Food systems and agricultural policies] affect availability and access to food through changes to food production, procurement and distribution... in turn bringing about a gradual shift in food culture, with consequent changes in dietary consumption patterns and nutritional status that vary with the socio-economic strata”

Source: Kennedy, Nantel and Shetty
How does food production influence our eating behaviours?

• Agricultural and food production policies have a major impact on food supply

• Food supply = nutritional quality of food that is available and affordable to consumers

• Dietary preferences, patterns, body weight and health outcomes
But modern manufactured food production is complex and involves many....

Inputs into production
- Develop the seeds and technologies for the production of sugar plants
- Their primary concern is the demand from farmers for sugar growing technologies. Due to the wide portfolio of products they supply, it is simple to refocus development to more in-demand plant varieties

Producers
- Growers of the plants that supply the raw materials for sugar
- Their primary concern is the economic return they can receive through sale of their crops. Low switching costs mean farmers can easily switch to growing more profitable crops if the price of sugar is too low

Primary Processors
- Purchase sugar plants from producers and refine for use in production
- Refiners are specialised in manufacturing refined sugar. They are highly reliant on demand as they are heavily invested with little alternative to switch to other products

Promotion and labelling
- Outside agencies that market the products on behalf of manufacturers
- Marketing companies have no direct stake in sugar. Their service is based on the ability to develop effective marketing campaigns regardless of product formulation. In fact, sugar reduction may increase demand for their services as new strategies are developed for products that are rebranded as part of the reformulation process

Retailers
- Sells the products to consumers
- Retailers make decisions on the products which they stock in their stores. As consumer demand for healthier products increase, and government applies pressure for sugar reduction, they may exert influence by focusing on stocking lower sugar products from manufacturers

Secondary manufacturers
- Purchase refined sugar from refiners for use in their breakfast cereal products
- Cereal manufacturers are highly dependent on sugar as core component of their products. While there is scope for limited reduction, there is currently no viable substitute that can replace it completely

Source: Draft only, not for circulation, under preparation for WHO Regional Office for Europe
Influences how we must think about policies for obesity prevention and tackling diet-related NCDs.... (dis)incentives

- **Production and Supply**
  - The main drivers affecting sugar output are the current levies and quotas as well as external trade restrictions, along with increased competition from alternatives.

- **Manufacturing**
  - Factors affecting the use of sugar stem from consumer demand for healthier products, health pressure groups, government pressure to reduce (in the form of guidelines), and the choices of grocery retailers to choose healthier products.

- **Sales and Marketing**
  - Consumer demand and health is a primary factor for retailers to reduce the sugary products on their shelves. Government pressure also drives retailer behavior towards healthier products.

Source: Draft only, not for circulation, under preparation for WHO Regional Office for Europe
Thank you!