

# **Green Paper**

## **“Promoting healthy diet and physical Activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases”**

### **Contribution from**

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PMM (Project Management & Marketing) is an agency in Athens with a lot of experiences in organizing different events and campaigns for national and international clients (e.g. road shows and events for Piraeus Bank, Hyundai and the City of Athens). A department of PMM is specialized on health subjects and is planning a nationwide information campaign in Greece about overweight children in cooperation with the Greek Ministry of Health.
- 2. ManSystems, 1523 Nikosia. 3A Nikis, Xenos Tower , Cyprus (Tel.: +357 22465990)**  
ManSystems Business Consultants is one of the Leading Consultancy Firms in Cyprus and maintains an International Network of Specialists and Associates. The main objective of ManSystems Business Consultants is to serve as a centre of excellence and offer comprehensive solutions in the fields of Strategic Planning, Business Organisation, Hospitality & Tourism, Event Organisation, Quality Management (ISO 9000/TQM), Food Safety & Hygiene (HACCP), Laboratory Accreditation (ISO 17025), CE Marking, Environmental Management (ISO 14001/Green Globe), Occupational Health & Safety (OHSAS 18001, Risk Assessment Studies), Human Resource Development, Operations Management, Project Management and Financial Management. ManSystems also participated in implementing integrated European projects.
- 3. Diastasi - Vocational Training Center, 11524 Athens, Kifisias Ave. 125 -127, Greece (Tel.: +210 6985820-30-40)**  
The Vocational Training Centre DIASTASI provides high quality educational services. Within this framework, it is active in organising open meetings and conferences but also in elaborating research and studies, aiming at diagnosing the market needs and the connection of training to employment. It also participated in implementing integrated European projects.

Recent data have shown that in Greece and Cyprus an increasing incidence of children and adult obesity can be observed and accounts creating high health care costs – this trend will furthermore increase in the future. Several surveys have indicated that the obesity level among children and adults in Southern Europe is higher than in the Northern European countries. The healthy Mediterranean diet has lost its important role in the nutrition scheme of the habitants – foods rich in fat, sugar and salt have become more important. In the last 16 years in Greece fast food consumption has increased by 950 %. Greece and Cyprus are among the European countries in which the overweight rates surpass that of the USA. The male obesity rates of Greece and Cyprus are the highest in Europe – reaching 27%. A further significant study in Greece reports a 38% prevalence of obesity among females and a study - conducted in the mid -1990s - suggested that 78% of men in Greece were overweight.

Especially the dramatic increase of overweight and obese Greek and Cyprian children during the last decade is alarming. Island of Crete has the highest percentage of children with obesity in Europe (35%). These facts have already become a central social problem but will become a huge burden for the Greece and Cyprus health system in the near future, because these children have a strong possibility to develop cardio-vascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, stroke, breathing problems and some forms of cancer as younger or middle aged adults.

More information and explanation (children, parents and school-system) is indispensable to stop this disquieting development.

Childhood obesity has multiple **causes** and results created by an interaction of nutritional, psychological, familial, and physiological factors.

- **Eating more kilojoules than are used** – children will store fat if they eat more energy (kilojoules) than they use. Increases in consumption of calorie-dense foods, as evidenced by the growth of fast-food chains and higher soft drink consumption, also point to a higher energy-intake.
- **Lack of physical activity** – A general reduction in activity during daily living (less walking, greater use of cars, escalators etc.) and also reductions in the amount of physical education and sport carried out at school and at home can be observed . Greek and Cyprian children spend a lot of hours at television, computer and other electronic games.
- **Fast Food:** From 1984 to 2000 there was an enormous increase in consumption of **fast food** in Greece by **956 % !**
- **77%** of Greek children **don't eat with their parents**
- **Lack of information:** **48%** of Greek children **never received information** about nutrition topics.
- **Unhealthy Food:** **63%** of the Greek children answered in a study, that they eat a lot of **red meat** and **51%** do **not consume a lot of vegetables** and **fruits**

## **2. Prevention / Treatment**

Increase in activity through lifestyle changes and exercise, reduction in energy intake and reduction in sedentary behaviour should be considered for the treatment of overweight and obesity.

Pan- European projects have to start in order to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity. All strategies have to be tuned and focused on the geographical and socio-economic considerations in the European countries and on the following different target groups:

- Children
- Adults / parents
- Pedagogues / teachers

### **Proposals on the different questions on which the commission invites contributions**

#### **IV 4. The Public Health Action Programme**

##### **How can the availability and comparability of data on obesity be improved, in particular with a view to determining the precise geographical and socioeconomic distribution of this condition?**

- Nutrition in the southern European countries is very different from the nutrition habits in middle and northern Europe. Therefore study data about nutrition and eating habits (causes of overweight and obesity) in the European community have to be assessed under these circumstances.
- In Greece and Cyprus (as in Italy, Spain and Portugal), the so called traditional "Mediterranean diet" played a very important role in the past and was responsible for the healthy lifestyle and the high life expectancy of the citizens of these countries. It has to be investigated if a "come back" of this traditional form of nutrition is possible and if this can help the southern European countries to increase a healthy nutrition.

##### **How can the programme contribute to raising the awareness of the potential which healthy dietary habits and physical activity have for reducing the risk for chronic diseases amongst decision makers, health professionals, the media and the public at large?**

A widespread information campaign, focusing on the different eating habits and target groups, is necessary to change the lifestyle in Greece and Cyprus.

Only an integrative approach of all decision makers, health professionals, the media and the educational system is able to solve these problems.

A lack of information (decision makers, media & the public at large) on different subjects is a fundamental basis for the existing problems and has to be changed:

- A lot of people don't know that they are overweight. The calculation and evidence of the BMI (Body Mass Index) is unknown. Information campaigns have to start immediately in order to focus on the determination of overweight and obesity
- Most citizens do not know anything about the risk of overweight, obesity and the risk of chronic diseases. The high prevalence of overweight children to become overweight or obese as adults with all its negative consequences (heart disease, metabolic syndrome etc.) is not known by parents. Health professionals, the national educational systems and media have to inform about the risk factors.
- Especially in Greece & Cyprus an alarming trend to manage the overweight problem with surgical methods (balloons etc.) can be observed. The reason that we name this trend as alarming, is the fact that it has no influence on the basic problem "wrong life style and low physical activity". Large advertisement campaigns and press work support this alarming trend. The media in both countries have to inform the citizen about the risks of this trend.
- At school, pedagogues and teachers are not informed enough about the problem. The school system has to inform especially the children in an adequate manner about the significance of obesity and low physical activity and its consequences.
- If possible school pedagogues have to be trained about the problems and prevention possibilities. As alternative path a "specific- education-staff" (dieticians) can be build up by advanced education and can be send nationwide to the schools, nursery schools etc.

**Which are the most appropriate dissemination channels for the existing evidence?**

- **Nationwide Information Campaigns:** To guarantee widespread information (in addition to media etc.) a **direct contact** to the citizens is important. Nationwide events in all cities, villages etc. are necessary. Different information material has to be produced in Greek language and has to be distributed to the different target groups. It has to be taken into account, that the information materials and the art of events have to be adapted to the different target groups (children & adults)
- **Internet:**  
The Internet is an adequate dissemination channel for children, adults and pedagogues for a lot of basic and actual information. It can be a portal for the exchange of information and opinions, for links to specific organizations, games about healthy nutrition and physical activities,

contests as well for training and teaching material for pedagogues (download of teaching material etc.)

A very popular and well developed internet site in Greek language is the internet site [www. e-paidia.net](http://www.e-paidia.net) , developed and hosted by the Lambrakis Foundation. The information material which has to be integrated in e-paidia.net has to be adapted to the different target groups and subjects.

- **Schools:** For an optimal prevention and promotion campaign the schools / nursery schools have to be integrated into the information program. Teachers and pedagogues have to be indoctrinated in the special subject. The children can be sensitized by different information tools in a playful manner (e.g. contest about healthy food, the development of a healthy school kiosk, etc..)

## V.!. Consumer information, advertising and marketing

**When providing nutrition information to the consumer, what are the major nutrients, and categories of products, to be considered and why?**

The development of an easy declaration system with the concentration of fat, sugar, salt, proteins, vitamins and conservation is necessary.

**Which kind of education is required in order to enable consumers to fully understand the information given on food labels, and who should provide it?**

Again the different education methods have to be focused on the different target groups:

**Adults:** Nationwide information campaigns and events in cities and villages, lectures by health care organizations. Short information Flyer in Supermarkets

**Children:** Education in school, visits in supermarkets, reading and explanation of the nutrition information by trained staff (teachers or dieticians). Pilot-projects in schools about different food advertisement campaigns – investigation if the promises they give are true or not – support of a more critical behavior of the children by more information.

## V.3. A focus on children and young people

**What are good examples for improving the nutritional value of school meals, and how can parents be informed on how to improve the nutritional value of home meals?**

An intensive cooperation between dieticians and school / nursery school canteens is necessary. Lectures about the possibilities of cooking healthy food can be given to the canteen staff.

Parents can be informed by pediatrics (Flyer in health care offices, more information by the physicians about the connection of healthy food, physical activity and the development of diseases). In addition lectures for parents at schools and nursery schools are a good dissemination channel.

**What is good practice for fostering healthy dietary choices at schools, especially as regards the excessive intake of energy-dense snacks and sugar-sweetened soft drinks?**

Again the first step is better information of the children about the risk of these foods (high-fat products, sweets, few fruits, soft drinks). In Greece more than 80% of the children buy their high energy snacks and soft drinks at the school kiosk.

Teachers and pedagogues or dieticians have to inform the children about the risks of this unhealthy food. Together with them the children can buy food at the school kiosk and they can investigate the contents (energy, fat, sugar, salt etc.) in the school lesson. In pilot-projects at different schools in Greece and Cyprus contests about the development of the "best healthy school kiosk" can be carried out.

#### **V.7. Socio-economic inequalities**

**Which measures, and at what level, would promote health diets and physical activity towards population groups and households belonging to certain socioeconomic categories, and enable these groups to adopt healthier lifestyles?**

The nationwide information campaigns about healthy food and more physical activity in the cities and villages have to be focused on these target groups too (events in town districts with low level of education and high rate of poverty and destitution)

In districts with a high rate of immigrants the information flyers have to be translated in different languages.

#### **V.11 Other issues**

**Are there issues not addressed in the present Green Paper which need consideration when looking at the European dimension of the promotion of diet, physical activity and health?**

Proposal for the support of healthy food and more physical activity for normal weight / overweight children in Greece and Cyprus

In both countries a lot of children spend a part of their summer holidays in special children vacation camps. These camps have the opportunity to

implement an education programme about the context of healthy food and physical activity. This programme can be put into practice. In addition the vacation camps can be used for specific programmes for overweight children (care and education by dieticians, diet and physical activity) – like some existing specific cures in other European countries.

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