



IV. STRUCTURES AND TOOLS AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

IV.3 Health across EU policies:

- *What are the concrete contributions which Community policies, if any, should make towards the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity, and towards creating environments which make healthy choices easy choices?*

The Community policies shouldn't include aspects that might affect health negatively. The Directorate General Health and Consumer Protection, through the Interservice Group, could make specific proposals to the other services in order to promote health (not just avoid the risks). This group could achieve synergies with the other services in an attempt to identify opportunities to increase physical activity and healthy diets.

- *Which kind of Community or national measures could contribute towards improving the attractiveness, availability, accessibility and affordability of fruits and vegetables?*
 - Subsidization of supplies to places with dining halls (old people's homes, schools, etc...) and certain groups of people (people who live alone, with little means of support....)
 - Economic policies towards the reduction in the price of fruits and vegetables.
 - Measures in order to maintain the natural flavour of the fruits and vegetables. According to the IEFS the flavour is one of main aspects for Europeans as it makes the fruits and vegetables more desirable for people (especially children)
 - Obligation for the advertisers to accompany, promotional messages and actions relating to drinks and foodstuffs, of medical information, or, if it's not the case, to pour a financial contribution equal to 1,5% of the sums intended for publicities and promotion at the State or European Union in order to finance actions of information and nutritional education
 - Prohibition of the vending-machines of soft drinks and manufactured foodstuffs for the children in the school
- *On which areas related to nutrition, physical activity, the development of tools for the analysis of related disorders, and consumer behaviour is more research needed?*

Studies aimed at knowing the habits of citizens and spotting the barriers that hinder them from eating better and being more active.

Studies like the ones carried out by the Institute of European Food Studies on the consumers' attitudes, should be made periodically and recorded in a website that can be accessed readily.

IV.4. The Public Health Action Programme

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions include:

- ***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?***

It would be interesting to fix a set of indicators, based for example on International Obesity Task Force (IOTF) stoutness curves, in order to monitor the obesity data and its determinants (eating habits and physical activity). From there on, the promotion of Regular Surveys on Nutrition and Life Habits (eating, physical activity...) representing all the European regions in order to evaluate the interventions implemented.

Improving the diffusion of the results, for example, creating a website where all the information could be recorded (directly or through links.)

It is important to bear in mind an ongoing registration system through Eurostat (por example, ongoing survey on consumption of foods)

- ***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?***

Through the diffusion to the professionals of health, to the professionals of education and sport and to the public of the existing evidences of the risk of illness validated by independent experts according to the variation in the life habits (for example the potential impact that a 45 minutes' walk has on the prevention of type II diabetes).

Proofs and evidences of the psychological and health benefits of leading an active life and a balanced diet adjusted to the caloric needs.

Implementation of studies on the economic impact of the decrease of sedentary lifestyle and obesity.

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

By means of:

- Devising positioning plans of the European Union.
- International meetings for the people responsible for the governments and health professionals.
- Agreements with scientific magazines, especially with the magazines of professional associations.
- Implementation of campaigns in the media, especially TV stations.
- Creation of a website.

V. AREAS FOR ACTION

V. 1 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?***

In the packaging:

- Recommendation on the daily/weekly consumption of fruits, vegetables and cereal products with low content of grease and fast sugars
- Warning against certain foods of which it is preferable to limit the consumption
- Written record of the composition of certain nutrients that are especially important to people who have certain pathologies (glucose, salt, gluten...)
- ***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?***

By the governments:

- Campaigns in the media urging the consumers to read the labels of the packaging and specific recommendations on how to read them properly.
- Establishing information offices (direct or virtual) where more information could be offered to those people interested.
- ***Are voluntary codes (“self-regulation”) an adequate tool for limiting the advertising and marketing of energy-dense and micronutrient-poor foods? GAT would be the alternatives to be considered if self-regulation fails?***
- ***How can effectiveness in self-regulation be defined, implemented and monitored? Which measures should be taken towards ensuring that the credulity and lacking media literacy of vulnerable consumers are not exploited by advertising, marketing and promotion activities?***

It is necessary to establish legislative measures that regulate the publicity and that deal with aspects like:

- Misleading advertisements that identify health and beauty with a product or make people think that its consumption is like taking less physical exercise or like eating a less balanced diet
- The promotion of products accompanied with presents and collectables and targeted on children (trading card albums, pins,...) should be forbidden.
- The vague concept, without scientific base, of energetic food used as promotional argument should be prohibited
- The foods enriched with certain nutrients (for example omega 3,...) should state that these nutrients are found in other foods
- Sometimes the visual message of an advertisement is more impressive than the verbal message and may therefore be misleading. This should be avoided.

V. 2 Consumer education

- ***How can consumers best be enabled to make informed choices and take effective action?***
- ***What contributions can public-private partnerships make toward consumer education?***

The role of consumers' associations:

- To report misleading publicity
- To carry out and promote (in their own magazines...) studies towards the comparison of the different brands of the same type of foods (yoghourts, donoughts, cakes,...). The studies of the nutritional properties of these type of foods will help consumers make the best choice.
- Agreements with national/regional governments in order to promote recommendations on balanced diets and physical activity
- Public-private partnerships with the production chain in order to promote the consumption of certain type of foods (fruit, vegetables, etc.) or drinks (water, etc.)
- ***In the field of nutrition and physical activity, which should be the key messages to give consumers, how and by whom should they be delivered?***

The messages should be few, brief and easily understood:

1. There are no forbidden foods. One can eat all kinds of food, but it must be a balanced diet, following the recommendations stated in the 'food pyramids' (eating less fat, sweets and red meat; eating more fruits, vegetables, pulses, etc...)
2. One can eat all kinds of food but in moderation. Obese or overweight people should eat less. All adults should be able to work out their BMI: Body Mass Index)
3. Exercise moderately every day. (walking for 45 minutes or more if possible)

These messages should be issued by health personnel and teachers of compulsory education. It would be interesting to promote these messages through supermarkets, food markets and other food outlets.

One of the keys to this strategy's success is the training of the health personnel and teachers on the basics of nutrition and physical activity.

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?***

The national and regional governments provide counselling for principals in those educational establishments that have dining halls. This counselling should include recommendations on how to improve school meals and different criteria on how to assess the said meals.

Likewise, the educational establishments should inform the parents of those children who have school meals on how to complete the daily diet (breakfast and dinner) on weekdays and on the weekends.

Regional programs can, like the regional program led in Aquitaine, help the children and the teenagers to improve, inside and outside of the school, their behaviour concerning the food and the physical activity.

- ***What is good practice for the provision of physical activity in schools on a regular basis?***

It is necessary to envisage an initial formation of the teachers and animators of Leisure centres on the reference frameworks of nutrition as well as a continuous training and to place at their disposal the nutritional tools for education and physical activity

- *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?*
- *How can the media, health services, civil society and relevant sectors of industry support health education efforts made by schools? What role can public-private partnerships play in this regard*

V. 4 Food availability, physical activity and health education at the work place.

- *How can employers succeed in offering healthy choices at workplace canteens, and in improving the nutritional value of canteen meals?*

By offering balanced meals and providing information on how to supplement these meals at home.

Employees' awareness of the importance of a balanced diet. This could be done by means of courses and seminars.

The trade unions must take on an important role. They should contribute to the employees' training as regards balanced diets and physical activity.

It would be advisable to create a European Network of Healthy Companies, where these measures could be included.

- *What measures would encourage and facilitate the practice of physical activity during breaks, and on the way to and from work?*

Although it is important to foster physical activity during working hours, this might be difficult to put into practice. An alternative measure could be to foster physical activity among employees and their relatives in their free time (outside working hours). For example: hiking, cycling, sporting events within the companies. Other good measures would be to provide fitness centres for the employees.

Likewise, group activities could help to motivate and unite companies. This is quite valuable from the point of view of the human resources management.

V. 5 Building overweight and obesity prevention and treatment into health services.

- *Which measures, and at what level, are needed to ensure a stronger integration aiming at promoting healthy diets and physical activity into health services?*

Early tracking and implementation of simple protocols on how the health personnel can provide, in an easy and efficient way, counselling on nutrition and physical activity for overweight and sedentary people and also people who suffer from type II diabetes, vascular diseases...

The actions carried out within this scope should be monitored and should be included in the health information systems.

V. 6 Addressing the obesogenic environment.

- ***In which ways can public policies contribute to ensure that physical activity be “built into” daily routines?***

Leisure time is an important part of everyday life. Many people devote part of their free time to physical activities: walking (alone or in the company of friends), jogging, cycling, exercising in parks and open spaces. Other people do this within their environment.

Local councils should:

- Create recreational facilities (e.g. parks) and sporting facilities (e.g. sports centres)
- Create counselling services for the citizens in order to provide information on how to take up physical activities, how to improve them...
- Signpost public spaces (parks,...) providing information on hiking routes, cycle routes. Distances and recommended times of these routes should also be duly signposted.
- Improve safety in these public spaces.

The local councils that are members of the European Network of Healthy Towns should could implement these measures.

- ***Which measures are needed to foster the development of environment that are conducive to physical activity?***

V. 7 Socio-economic inequalities

- ***Which measures, and at what level, would promote healthy diets and physical activity towards population groups and households belonging to certain socioeconomic categories, and enable these groups to adopt healthier lifestyles?***
- ***How can the “clustering of unhealthy habits” that has frequently been demonstrated for certain socio-economic groups be addressed?***

V. 8 Fostering an integrated and comprehensive approach towards the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity.

- ***Which are the most important elements of an integrated and comprehensive approach towards the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity?***

The promotion and prevention should be integrated in the guidelines on the treatment of certain diseases (e.g type II diabetes)

Coordination of the different sectors and the achievement of synergies. For example the health services and local councils could help each other in order to foster physical activity by means of facilitating the access of patients to facilities or municipal sports centres so as to improve their health.

- ***Which role at national and at Community level?***

The Member States and the European Union must facilitate the exchanges and the mutualisation of the tools, and support the coherence of the led actions

V. 9 Recommendations for nutrient intakes and for the development of food-based dietary guidelines.

- *In which way could social and cultural variations and different regional and national dietary habits be taken into account in food-based dietary guidelines at a European level?*
- *How can the gaps between proposed nutrient targets and actual consumption patterns be overcome?*

For the two previous issues, it would be necessary to devise conversion tables of foods and nutrients validated, adapted and accessible. These tables would be based on the diversity of products that are common in every region.

The aforementioned conversion tables could advise the citizens on how to change from their current eating habits to healthier ones, taking into account aspects like price, tastes of the foods, cooking time, preserving...

- *How can dietary guidelines be communicated to consumers?*
- *In which way could nutrient profile scoring systems such as developed recently in the UK contribute to such developments?*

V. 10 Cooperation beyond the European Union:

- *Under which conditions should the Community engage in exchanging experience and identifying best practice between the EU and non-EU countries? If so, through which means?*
- *Are the 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?*

Some comments:

The knowledge and information of the citizens as regards foods and physical activity is the key to the success of the strategy. In this case the problem is not so much the lack of knowledge, but the excessive number of sources and contents the citizens receive. These sources and their contents confuse them. This is why it would be advisable to draw up consensual documents regarding the different aspects. The proposals should be implemented by the governments. The goal is to provide the citizens with a consensual and reliable source of information. The starting point could be the work that has already been done by the EUFIC.

It would be sensible to change the word 'consumer' ,in the text, for 'citizen' and therefore we could include in the Green paper other aspects that explain the current problems of sedentary lifestyle and obesity. Other aspects like the influence of friends and co-workers, family preferences on foods, family life planning, sociological aspects, the use of leisure time, social relationships, etc have a great influence and should be integrated in the strategy.

Legislative measures could be taken towards the restriction and prohibition against selling certain types of foods (foods rich in saturated fats, sugar...) especially in governmental premises (estate, regional and local organizations) and primary and secondary schools and health centres.

Lastly, the governments should earmark more money for the implementation of programmes that promote health and prevention of illnesses. A good measure could be to allocate a fixed amount of money (e.g. 5%) of the overall health budget to personnel, training, research etc in order to promote health and sanitary education.

- ***Which of the issues addressed in the present Green paper should receive first priority, and whichh may be considered less pressing?***

First priority:

- The early tracking of overweight
- The training of health personnel and school teachers
- Dissemination of validated tools for early tracking of overweight
- Psychological following of children in overweight
- drawing up programmes on the promotion of healthy foods and physical activity, targeted at health service users and school children.
- The training of consumers
- Organization and financing of therapeutic sports activities for children in overweight

Less pressing:

- The introduction of voluntary codes (“self-regulation”) by companies.

This paper represents the views of its author on the subject. These views have not been adopted or in any way approved by the Commission and should not be relied upon as a statement of the Commission's or Health & Consumer Protection DG's views. The European Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this paper, nor does it accept responsibility for any use made thereof.