The EURO-PREVOB Project

Consortium for the prevention of obesity through effective nutrition and physical activity actions

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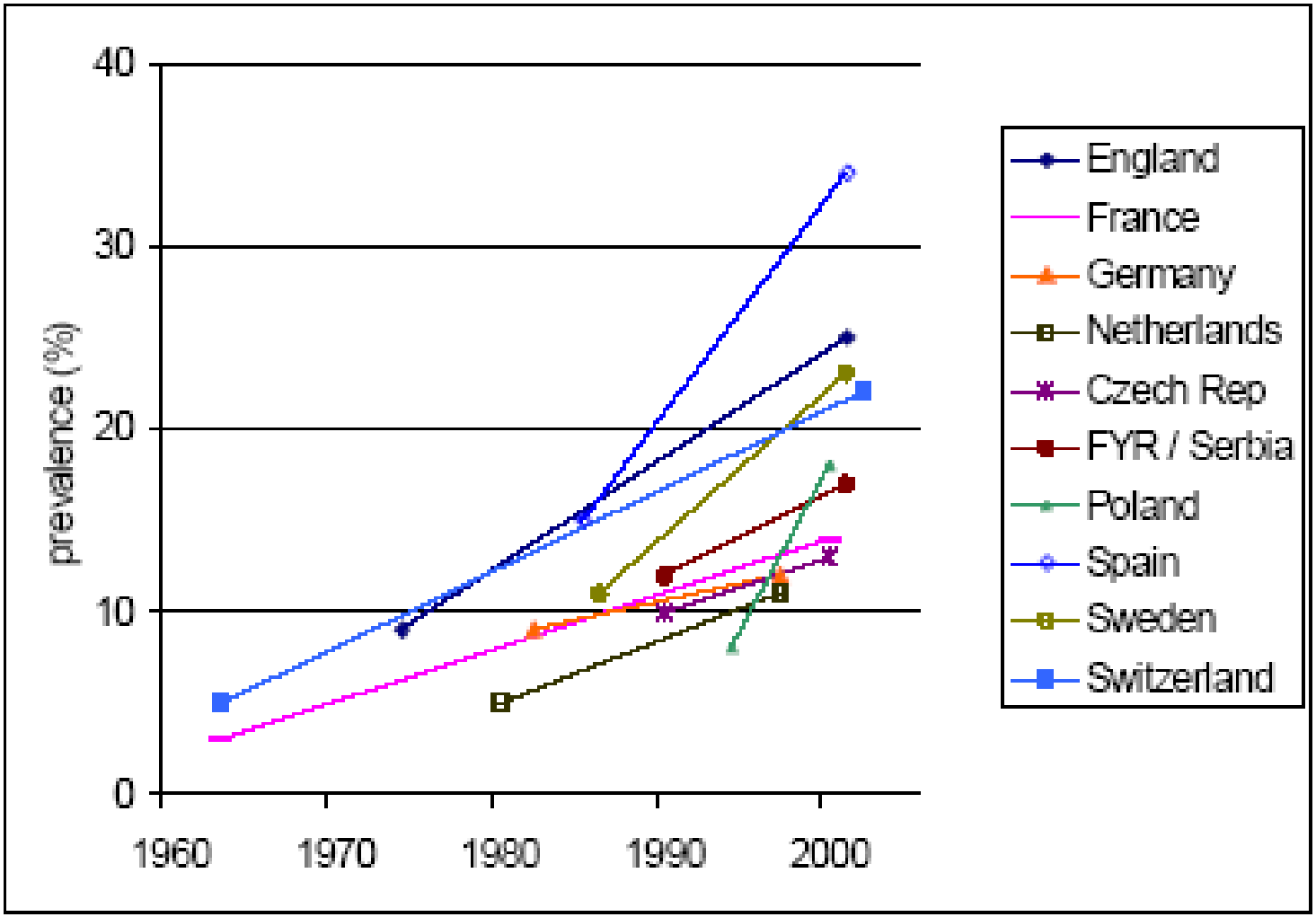
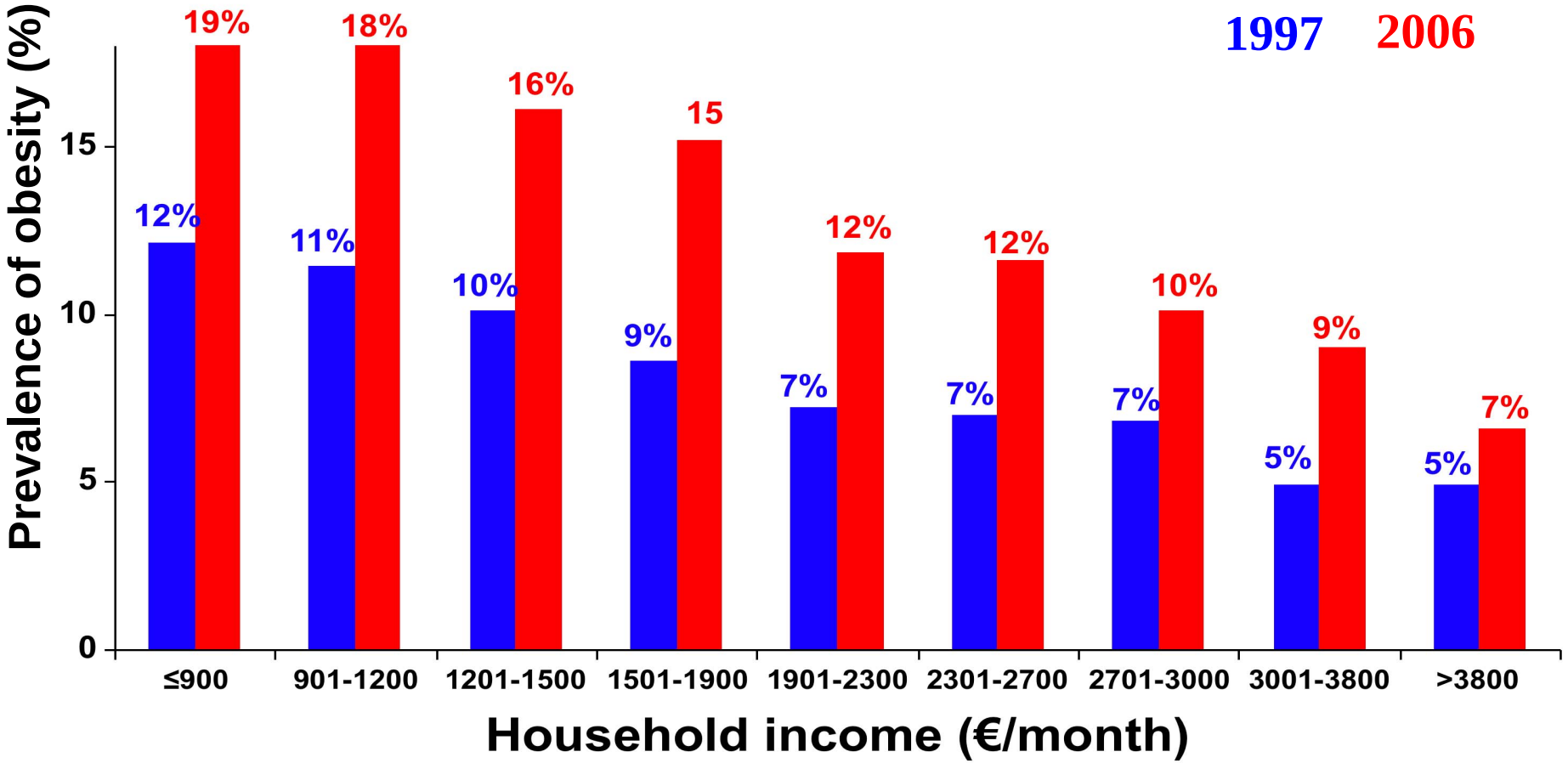
- 3-year project, funded under FP6- until March 2010
- coordinated by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
- 14 participants from 10 countries, working in nutrition, physical activity research, public health, epidemiology, and economics
  - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Italy, Latvia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Turkey, UK
- Focus on policy assessment, environmental determinants of obesity and inequalities in obesity

Premises:
Obesity prevalence is increasing



Source: Jackson-Leach & Lobstein 2006

Socioeconomic inequalities in obesity are increasing:
example of French adults



SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

Source: Charles et al., Obesity 2008
(data from the French National Survey Obepi)

EURO-PREVOB

Premises

- Individuals (and their intrinsic risk of obesity) are influenced by the environments in which they live.
- We need to understand these environmental determinants of obesity in different countries / contexts and develop methods to measure them.
- The relevant policies and interventions need to encourage an environment that promotes, protects and supports food and nutrition security and access to physical activity, and addresses socioeconomic inequalities in obesity

Project objectives

1. **Overview** the determinants of, and inequalities in, obesity in Europe and policy initiatives to tackle obesity
2. Develop and pilot a **tool** which would assess policies related to obesity in Europe and examine the food and built environments in wealthy and deprived areas
3. Make **recommendations** to prevent obesity, especially in vulnerable groups, and develop means to evaluate the economics of policy options
4. Promote **networking** among those engaged in research in nutrition, physical activity, obesity and inequalities in obesity in Europe

Outputs [1]: literature reviews

- **Review of reviews** on

1. What is known on obesity and inequalities in European countries
2. What relevant policies make a difference
3. Gaps in knowledge

Outputs [2]: Policy Analysis Tool

- A portfolio of instruments that can help policy makers identify what needs to be done to adequately respond to obesity.
- Pilot tests in 5 countries, using a common methodology, to assess the relevance and applicability of the tool in various settings
  - Bosnia & Herzegovina (Riga)
  - Czech Republic (Brno)
  - France (Marseille)
  - Latvia (Riga)
  - Turkey (Ankara)

Outputs [3]: Recommendations & Practical guide to economic analysis

- Currently developing:

1. **Policy recommendations** to create supportive environments for healthier diet and physical activity taking into account socio-economic inequalities

2. a **practical guide to economic analysis of obesity prevention options**

   - How to estimate costs, effectiveness and benefits of obesity prevention

   - Some illustrative examples of economic evaluation of obesity prevention on the basis of a literature review

Policy Analysis Tool:

1. **POLICY CHECKLIST:** to assess the existing policy response to obesity and its determinants, and to identify gaps that can be filled ("policy on the book").

2. **COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRE:** to assess selected aspects of the food and built environments in affluent and deprived neighbourhoods ("policy on the street").

Areas covered by the Policy Checklist

Food environment	Built environment	Maternal & child services	Schools
•Food production •Food manufacturing •Food trade/distribution •Food/beverages labelling •Food/beverage marketing/ advertising •Food price control policy	•Urban planning •Transport and road safety •Active transport •Sporting facilities •Leisure facilities	•Appropriate weight gain/ loss for women during/ after pregnancy •Infant and young child feeding / breastfeeding	•Nutrition and/or physical activity school policy •Nutrition/ PA education •School meals •Marketing restrictions •Free drinking water •Safe walk to school routes
•Social welfare policy influencing obesity **•Health inequalities policy influencing obesity** •Other obesity, nutrition, PA policy documents			

The Community Questionnaire examines…

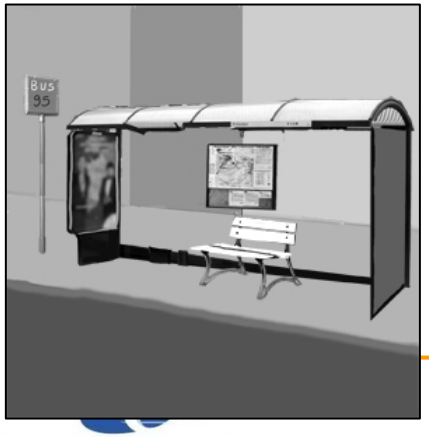
- the **Food environment** in affluent vs. deprived neighbourhoods in terms of
  - the density of stores selling foods (area census)
  - the cost and availability of indicative food items in grocery stores of different sizes
  - the presence and type of advertising at the front of these grocery stores
  - the cost and marketing related to selected fast food items
  - the nature and extent of advertising during children television

- The **built environment** i.e. the walkability' and 'bikability' of affluent vs. deprived neighbourhoods in terms of:
  - the availability and quality of:
    - cycle lanes
    - public open spaces (parks and playgrounds)
    - public transport stops
    - marked road crossings
    - sidewalks or pavements
  - traffic volume
  - evidence of 'attractiveness / unattractiveness'

Illustrations used to help assess quality of built environment

Marked road crossings

Public transport stops



Preliminary findings

- The Policy Analysis Tool was considered by the five pilot countries to be user-friendly, relevant and very useful as a research instrument to improve the policy response:
  - Variation in public access to policy documents
  - A lack of monitoring and evaluation of policies was reported in all countries
  - Variation in the number of policy documents retrieved that explicitly discuss obesity and and/or inequalities

Policy areas and selected issues	BiH	France	Turkey
Food and nutrition environment	**n=29**	**n=24**	**n=43**
% with focus on SE inequalities	38%	67%	49%
% with focus on obesity	6%	100%	21%
Physical activity and built environment	**n=7**		**n=13**
% with focus on SE inequalities	100%		43%
% with focus on obesity	0%		39%
Maternal and young child health services	**n=9**		**n=10**
% with focus on SE inequalities	100%		100%
% with focus on obesity	55%		10%
Schools	**n=9**		**n=2**
% with focus on SE inequalities	100%		100%
% with focus on obesity	22%		100%

The Policy Analysis Tool:

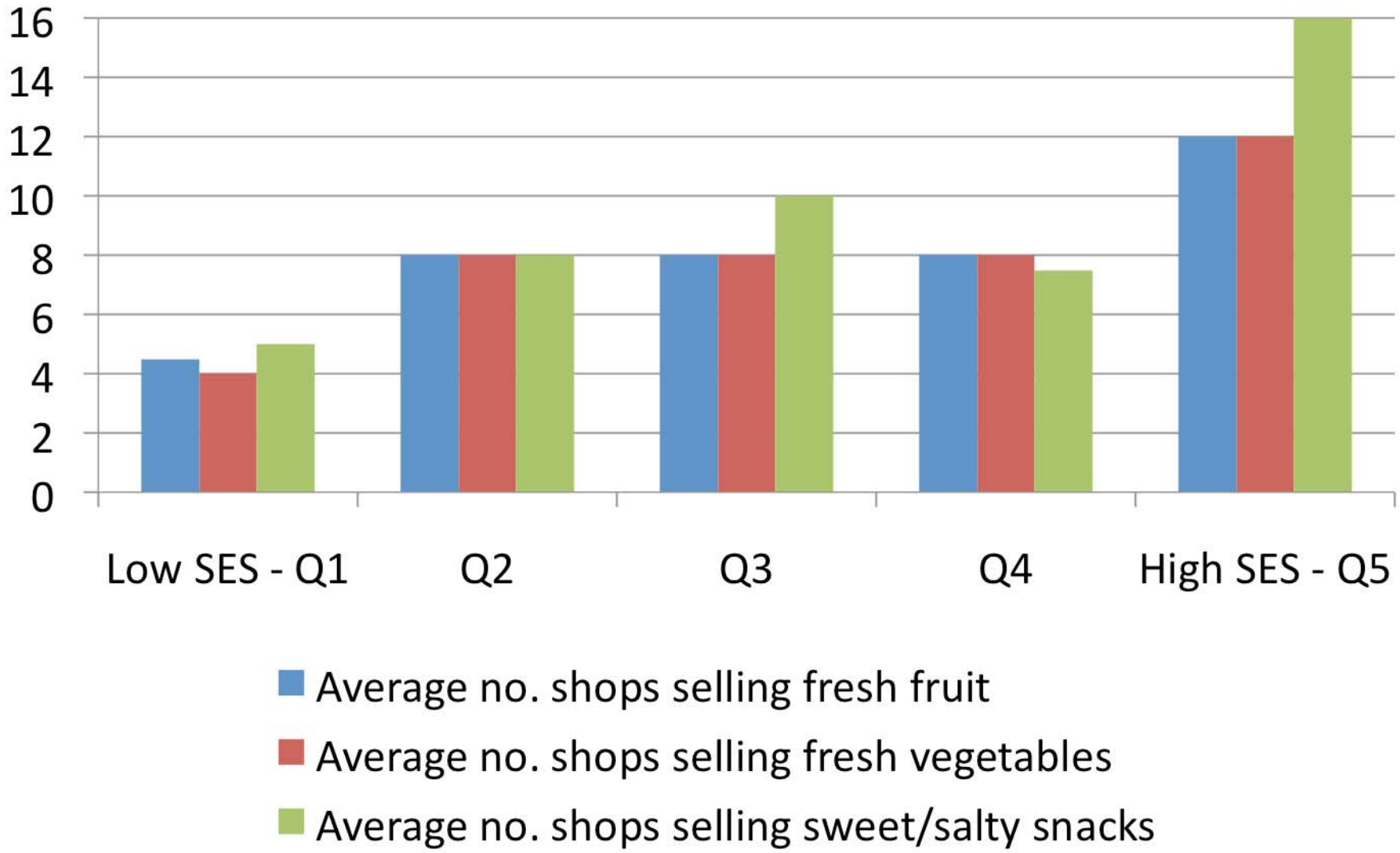
- Captured variations in environmental determinants of obesity in five very distinct contexts and in areas of different socioeconomic status
- Uncovered important challenges to assessing the living environment e.g.
  - Difficulties in sampling survey areas of varying SES
    - Completely different data available in the 5 pilot countries
  - Potential differences in the meaning of contextual variables

Opportunities for contributing to policy development?

The Policy Analysis Tool can

- potentially generate long-term information about
  - the implementation of policies and the enforcement of laws
  - markers of obesogenic environments within a city and/or country
- facilitate international and within-country comparisons
- contribute to improving quantitative and qualitative research methodologies
- be linked to surveys on individual diet and physical activity behaviour, perceptions, and to obesity prevalence.

No. of shops selling selected food items in areas (approx. 0.25km^2) of different socioeconomic levels, Sarajevo



- potentially support “exploratory / experimental” research in obesity prevention
  - e.g. by capturing elements of living environments that could be more linked to the risk of weight gain than expected
- be adapted to reflect the local policy level
- be adapted to study additional settings (e.g. schools, workplace)
- more systematically examine the practical outcomes (or lack thereof) of national and local policies

Thank you

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