



The Importance of Breakfast in Europe

A Review of National Policies and Health Campaigns



in partnership with

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The information and views set out in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of these people and organisations.

Foreword

Dear Reader,

Countless parents and health professionals agree – breakfast is the most important meal of the day. One of the best ways to start the day the right way is to have a nutritious meal – and, indeed, many diet and lifestyle campaigns now reflect this.

At Breakfast is Best our overall mission is to call on stakeholders across Europe to recognise the importance of breakfast in healthy lifestyle choices and combating health inequalities. With non-communicable diseases on the rise, and many Europeans skipping breakfast, the initiative aims to encourage Europe's decision-makers to take the necessary steps to promote breakfast as part of a balanced lifestyle. Founded as a coalition of stakeholders working together to promote the understanding of the benefits of breakfast, the Breakfast is Best campaign brings together European associations of dietitians, pediatric dietitians, doctors and the breakfast cereal industry.

Dr. Vincenzo Costigliola of the European Medical Association has commented, "The benefits of breakfast are clear and scientifically proven, and it is essential that decision-makers wake-up to the importance of breakfast and play a full part in encouraging Europeans to eat breakfast more regularly." Yet too few public health authorities include breakfast in their guidance despite good nutritional, practical and social reasons to recommend breakfast consumption, particularly for children and adolescents.

Building on our achievements from past years, the Breakfast is Best campaign teamed up with Professor Louise Dye, an expert on nutrition and behaviour from the University of Leeds, to produce this informative report on breakfast consumption data and trends across Europe. Looking in particular into the provision of information on and promotion of breakfast in 16 different European countries, this report is aimed first and foremost at EU policymakers, national government representatives, health practitioners such as dietitians and doctors, but also teachers, parents and the general public.

The review examines what health ministries and agencies say about breakfast, whether they actively promote breakfast consumption in health campaigns aimed particularly at children and adolescents, and the clarity and accessibility of the material used to do so. In addressing the information gaps in Europe on the importance of breakfast, this report celebrates the countries that are actively promoting the consumption of breakfast while at the same time drawing attention to the gaps that exist from country to country. We ultimately aim to work towards achieving the inclusion of breakfast consumption as a key health recommendation across the European Union.

We believe the message on the importance of breakfast is a crucial one, and hope that these findings open the door to greater dialogue on how to better address Europe's health challenges, together.

Kind regards,

The Breakfast is Best Coalition

“ The benefits of breakfast are clear and scientifically proven, and it is essential that decision-makers wake-up to the importance of breakfast and play a full part in encouraging Europeans to eat breakfast more regularly. ”

Dr Vincenzo Costigliola
President
European Medical Association





Part 1

Introduction

Executive Summary

The benefits of breakfast as part of a healthy and balanced lifestyle are widely known and understood from a nutritional, psychological and societal point of view. Studies show breakfast consumption is associated with a number of critical health factors which include healthy body weight, especially among children and adolescents,¹ but also lower Body Mass Index and a lower likelihood of being overweight more generally.² This is particularly important at a time when Europe's obesity rates are on the rise. Breakfast is also linked to better consumption of vitamins and minerals (including calcium, vitamin D, folic acid, iron and fibre).^{3,4}

While the health and lifestyle implications of regular breakfast consumption are largely understood, breakfast skipping remains far too common, and many European governments do not devote sufficient effort to encouraging Europeans to have breakfast.

The Importance of Breakfast in Europe: A Review of National Policies and Health Campaigns takes a unique look into the way governments communicate around, and promote consumption of, breakfast. This report, providing an analysis of information on and promotion of breakfast in 16 European countries, is the result of work conducted by the Breakfast is Best campaign – which includes the European Breakfast Cereal Association (CEEREAL), the European Medical Association (EMA), the European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) and the European Club of Paediatric Dietitians/le Club Européen des Diététiciens de l'Enfance (CEDE) – and Professor Louise Dye, an expert on nutrition and behaviour at the University of Leeds.

The 16 countries were selected on the basis of available public information, drawing on data from the latest "Health Behaviour in School-aged Children" (HBSC) study published in 2016 by the World Health Organization (WHO)⁵ and national authority websites, scientific papers and literature reviews, and other sources. While this first edition covers 16 EU countries, we aim to expand this over time to cover all EU Member States.

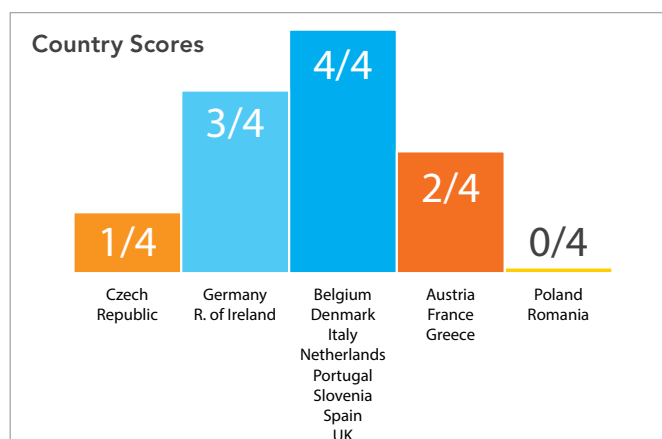
This report aims to be a reference and benchmark for evaluating public policies when it comes to improving Europe's breakfast consumption figures and reaping the potential health benefits thereof. It can act as a means to encourage greater dialogue with health experts, health organisations, and industry alike, who can add value and bring unique insight in helping to shape such policies.

The following four key benchmarks were used to analyse overall performance based on how well each country's government meets the four criteria:

1. Does the Ministry of Health or another national ministry reference the importance of breakfast in its official documentation or communications?

2. Does the Ministry of Health or another national ministry actively monitor and measure breakfast consumption data as a key indicator of health and well-being?
3. Is the information provided by public authorities on breakfast consumption and related health and lifestyle aspects clear and user-friendly?
4. Does the government organise or support ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits?

Half of all countries surveyed met all four criteria. These included Belgium, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and the UK, which shows that top performers can be found in both northern and southern Europe. On the other hand, Poland and Romania came out at the bottom, meeting none of the criteria, and the Czech Republic only ticked one box. 80% of surveyed countries were found to have referenced the importance of breakfast in public material produced by the relevant government agency or ministry and to have scored well on the quality and user-friendliness of breakfast-related information.



This report also compares these findings to breakfast consumption figures. Unsurprisingly, for the most part the countries that promote breakfast most effectively are also leaders among 11 and 15-year-olds who eat breakfast every weekday. The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the Republic of Ireland, Belgium's Flemish Community, England and Denmark lead for 11-year-olds (of which at least 78% regularly have breakfast), with Slovenia and Romania trailing in last place (only around 55% regularly breakfast). Very similar rankings can be seen among 15-year-olds: nearly the same countries are top rankers (averaging between 62% and 80%), with the exception of England which drops significantly in ranking in this older age group; and Slovenia and Romania are again at the bottom (under 40%), although Slovenia has recently taken active measures to improve these statistics and ranks among this report's top performers, suggesting that these figures might improve in the coming years. A gender gap is increasingly visible with age, with older adolescent boys more likely to have breakfast every school day than their female counterparts.

1 de la Hunty A, Gibson S, Ashwell M. (2013). Does regular breakfast cereal consumption help children and adolescents stay slimmer? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Obesity Facts* 6 (1): 70-85.
 2 de la Hunty A, Ashwell M. (2007). Are people who regularly eat breakfast slimmer than those who don't? A systematic review of the evidence. *Nutrition Bulletin* 32: 118-28.
 3 Barr SI, DiFrancesco L and Fulgoni VL. (2013). Consumption of Breakfast and the type of breakfast are positively associated with nutrient intakes and adequacy of Canadian adults. *Journal of Nutrition* 143 (1): 86-92.
 4 Barr SI, DiFrancesco L and Fulgoni VL. (2014). Breakfast consumption is positively associated with nutrient adequacy in Canadian children and adolescents. *British Journal of Nutrition* 112: 1373-1383.

Most notably, this report highlights that many governments need to increase their focus on breakfast consumption as part of healthy diet and living strategies, and better inform the general public on the scientifically proven benefits of positive breakfast behaviour throughout one's lifetime. As breakfast skipping has been associated with other health-compromising behaviours in children and adolescents – including physical inactivity⁶ and low fruit and vegetable intake⁷ – it seems clear that promoting positive behaviours, such as breakfast consumption, could be an important step for public health bodies.

The report also identifies examples of good practice which can serve as a practical guide for other governments and health organisations in adapting breakfast promotion policies.

For example, of the eight countries that met all four criteria, the UK authorities incorporate the promotion of breakfast in many of their general health initiatives, but have also set up breakfast-specific campaigns and initiatives, most notably breakfast clubs and schemes offering free school breakfast. The Dutch government takes a similar approach with its annual week-long “National School Breakfast” initiative. Moreover, both countries’ focus on media coverage and narrative seems particularly effective, generating publicity about the importance of not skipping breakfast. The UK “Shake Up Your Wake Up” campaign and its annual “Breakfast Week” are leading examples, as is the UK government’s support and public encouragement of effective civil society initiatives.

In Italy, a teaching kit and user manual emphasising the benefits of not skipping breakfast and recommending certain breakfast items was developed by the Italian Ministry of Health for primary school children. Italy also supports a surveillance programme that measures childhood obesity and collects information on weight, dietary habits, physical activity and sedentary behaviours, enabling the relevant ministries to monitor and evaluate information on breakfast habits in children.

The Portuguese government highlights the importance of healthy breakfasts as part of its “Eat Slowly and Well & Move too” (*Come Devagar e Bem & Mexe-te Também*) project, an awareness and education campaign that actively monitors the nutritional status of primary school children and assesses the effectiveness of the campaign on the practices carried out by the students.

In addition to promoting healthy breakfast consumption with dedicated websites and other user friendly tools including publicly-recognisable labels and logos used in campaigns encouraging healthy breakfasts, the Danish government has initiated comprehensive and extensive surveys, studies and reports assessing the breakfast habits of its population and the health effects thereof, enabling it to set up evidence-based practices established on academic and scientific-based research. The Spanish government also proactively supports evidence-based actions and interventions in all areas of society to promote healthy lifestyles and breakfast consumption, such as user friendly tools for use in the classroom and at home, television campaigns and an awareness day. The establishment of the Observatory for Nutrition and the Study of Obesity as well as regular nation-wide health

surveys ensure the government can monitor the nutritional situation and evolution of obesity of the Spanish population.

Despite language, cultural and regional differences, Belgium scores well for various reasons, including the importance it places on monitoring the health of the nation, and the local or regional (rather than national) implementation of its health-focused programmes, perhaps allowing for better efficiency.

Slovenia also monitors breakfast behaviour, and as a result has set concrete goals such as increasing the prevalence of the population that eats a daily breakfast by 10%. Popular awareness days such as “Slovenian Food Day” and “Traditional Slovenian Breakfast” have been implemented and are actively supported by the government for many years now, educating youth about locally sourced food and healthy breakfast table habits.

Other examples of good practice can be found within the pages of this report.

While breakfast is only one potential factor among many that may influence health indicators, promoting breakfast could be a cost-effective way to achieve positive outcomes and assist in reducing the economic health burden of obesity and related non-communicable diseases.

The EU has already taken some steps in the right direction towards addressing pan-European health issues, yet more needs to be done to promote breakfast consumption as a tool in addressing today's health challenges, particularly as there is currently no dedicated EU level campaign.

That is why the “Breakfast is Best” campaign focuses on three main policy goals:

1. The long term goal of ensuring that, by 2020, all EU countries include the importance of eating breakfast in their nutrition policies, and monitor breakfast consumption as a key health indicator.
2. Have “Eat breakfast everyday” added to standard nutrition advice, and include the importance of breakfast in school curricula and employee health initiatives.
3. Ensure that the “Health 2020 strategy” of the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) and EU actions on health inequalities reflect the importance of eating breakfast for long-term health outcomes.

Through these and other actions, and in working alongside other like-minded stakeholders and partners, the Breakfast is Best campaign calls on Europe's policymakers – both at national and EU level – schools, businesses and civil society alike to do more to help improve breakfast consumption figures and reap the potential health benefits thereof, for today and generations to come. We hope that this report can contribute to achieving these aims.

5 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

6 Sandercock GRH, Voss C and Dye L. (2010). Associations between habitual school day breakfast consumption, body mass index, physical activity and cardiorespiratory fitness in English schoolchildren. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 64: 1086-1092.

7 Pedersen TP, Meilstrup C, Holstein BE and Rasmussen M. (2012). Fruit and vegetable intake is associated with frequency of breakfast, lunch and evening meal: cross-sectional study of 11-, 13-, and 15-year-olds. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition & Physical Activity* 9 (9): 1479-5868.

About the Breakfast is Best Campaign

Although the idea of breakfast being the most important meal of the day is widely known and understood, many Europeans fail to act on this knowledge. This is why the European Breakfast Cereal Association (CEEREAL) representing the European breakfast cereal and oat milling industries joined forces with like-minded health organisations such as the European Medical Association (EMA), the European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) and the European Club of Paediatric Dietitians/*le Club Européen des Diététiciens de l'Enfance* (CEDE) to launch the science-based "Breakfast is Best" campaign in 2008.

The purpose of our coalition is to significantly increase awareness among European and national level decision makers about the importance of breakfast and ensure that the message "breakfast is the most important meal of the day" is as well understood and acted upon as the advice to "eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day".

In so doing the campaign aims to highlight the positive impact of breakfast in four key areas:

- In helping **to prevent obesity**
- As an aid to **improve general health**
- **Maintain cognitive performance and concentration**
- Provide the body with the energy it needs **to kick-start metabolism**

The Breakfast is Best campaign calls on policymakers to include the importance of breakfast in dietary recommendations and to monitor breakfast consumption as a key health indicator. More specifically the campaign urges the European Union and Member States to:

- Include "eat breakfast every day" in public health information campaigns
- Have "eat breakfast every day" added to all lists of standard nutrition advice tips
- Include the importance of breakfast in school curricula
- Encourage public-private partnerships, employers and civil society to promote breakfast in the workplace, in schools and at home

Together with a wide range of multi-stakeholder supporters from across Europe, we call on European leaders to put breakfast at the heart of public health promotion campaigns and encourage Europeans to "Make Time for Breakfast" as a significant but achievable step towards achieving healthier lifestyles. In order to achieve this, we have set some clear objectives:

1. Ensuring that, **by 2020, all EU countries include the importance of eating breakfast in their nutrition policies and monitor breakfast consumption as a key health indicator.**

2. **"Eat breakfast everyday"** is added to standard **nutrition advice** and the importance of breakfast is included in **school curricula** and **employee health** initiatives.
3. The **WHO/Europe "Health 2020 strategy"** and **EU actions on health inequalities** reflect the importance of eating breakfast for long-term health outcomes.

As an active member since its launch in 2008, EFAD supports BIB because it recognises breakfast is an important opportunity to improve nutrient intake for people of all ages. According to Judith Liddell, Secretary General of EFAD, "Skipping breakfast tends to cause people to snack (possibly unhealthily) mid-morning, so there are definite benefits to eating something over nothing in the morning. Ideally people should eat a breakfast containing a balance of food groups including fruit, fibre, dairy and other traditional breakfast foods. Regularly eating a healthy breakfast can reduce the risk of becoming obese which can lead to diabetes and high blood pressure." She continues, "the Breakfast is Best initiative is the only EU campaign that promotes breakfast as a contributor to public health both to the public and, just as importantly, to policymakers."

"The Breakfast is Best initiative is the only EU campaign that promotes breakfast as a contributor to public health both to the public and, just as importantly, to policymakers."

Judith Liddell, Secretary General, EFAD

As part of its engagement programme, the Breakfast is Best campaign launched a "Make Time for Breakfast Pledge" initiative, gathering support and signatures from healthcare professionals, to policymakers, to the general public from around the world, driving awareness on the benefits of breakfast as a tool to address health challenges in the 21st century.

For further information on the Breakfast is Best initiative, please visit our website www.breakfastisbest.eu, visit our pledge page at www.breakfastisbest.eu/pledge, or follow us on Twitter [@BreakfastIsBest](https://twitter.com/BreakfastIsBest).



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Report Methodology

The aim of this report was to be a pan-European report on the current state of play of national nutrition guidelines, policies and health campaigns currently in place at member state level. A geographical cross section of European member states was selected in order to gather as inclusive and as broad a picture of the measures and initiatives in place across Europe as possible. 16 European Union countries were selected, based on the quality and availability of information for each, with the information and data collected over a period of twelve months.

Information permitting, we foresee that more countries will be included in future editions of this report, with the ultimate aim of providing a complete map of all

EU member activities and commitments in this area.

Key data on children's breakfast consumption presented in the latest "Health Behaviour in School-aged Children" (HBSC) study published in 2016 by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe¹ has been referenced throughout all country reviews.

With regard to adult breakfast consumption data, we reviewed data made available to us through national authority websites, scientific papers and literature reviews, and other sources provided to us by national organisations. Unfortunately, a single pan-European level survey on breakfast consumption

has not been conducted to date. Therefore, the information for this report was gathered from the different countries' available sources. This information was collated and combined from multiple surveys, conducted at different times and with different methodologies, and as such the findings presented here may not be as accurate as or comparable to the WHO HBSC's data on child and adolescent breakfast consumption.

Where possible, the decision has been to refer to government conducted studies rather than market research or industry funded studies.



¹ Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

Introduction

The benefits of breakfast have long been understood – and even reflected in the Chinese proverb “Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dinner like a pauper”. Starting the day with a nutritious, healthy meal is recommended by many healthy eating campaigns, medical practitioners, dietitians and other health professionals, as well as countless books, magazines and web sites offering healthy dietary or weight management advice.

Despite the fact that there are good nutritional, practical and social reasons to recommend breakfast consumption, today’s lifestyles mean that dietary practices are changing and it is important to consider the consequences of such change. At a time when more and more people live busy lives where they tend to skip breakfast for reasons such as shortage of time, it is more important than ever to ensure the message of the importance of breakfast remains at the forefront of people’s minds. Recommendations should be based on sound evidence. Importantly therefore, we should consider whether there is evidence to recommend consumption of breakfast for health and well-being and the role of government agencies in promoting breakfast to maintain and improve health.

This report summarises the emphasis placed on the importance of breakfast as a healthy lifestyle choice and the

“Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dinner like a pauper”

initiatives supported by government departments that include breakfast as a strategy to tackle health inequalities in 16 European countries. It examines what ministries of health, or other relevant ministries, government bodies and agencies, say about breakfast, whether they actively promote breakfast consumption in health campaigns aimed particularly at children and adolescents, and the clarity and accessibility of the material used to do so.

The report also highlights gaps in knowledge about the benefits of breakfast and identifies countries where the provision of information is scarce. It draws on the latest available surveys and research evidence to document the prevalence of breakfast consumption in children and adolescents as well as adults and highlights the worrying trend in breakfast skipping. The focus is mainly on breakfast consumption in children and adolescents since it is widely

accepted that habits, particularly related to food intake, formed in childhood tend to be maintained into adulthood.¹

National variations in breakfast consumption across the 16 EU countries reviewed are examined in the light of the rising prevalence of obesity in our young people. According to the World Health Organization, this worrying and continuing trend is associated with significant health, economic and social costs and, despite national and international concern, the trend is towards an increase in obesity in most European countries.² Examples of good practice are identified so that relevant government bodies delivering health promotions can adapt these strategies to promote breakfast as an important lifestyle choice, with the potential of informing future initiatives to improve the health and well-being of young people and ultimately the European population as a whole.

The goal of this report is to increase the role of public and/or private intervention in promoting the importance of breakfast, building on progress made through the Breakfast is Best campaign to achieve its goal of ensuring that there is increased promotion of breakfast consumption, and the health benefits thereof, in Europe. Ultimately, such initiatives should contribute to improving the health and well-being of European citizens.

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- Definitions: glycogen: the body breaks down most carbohydrates from the foods we eat and converts them to a type of sugar called glucose. Glucose is the main source of fuel for our cells. When the body does not need to use the glucose for energy, it stores it in the liver and muscles. This stored form of glucose is made up of many connected glucose molecules and is called glycogen.
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The Importance of Breakfast

Breakfast consumption is part of a healthy lifestyle and can provide nutritional, psychological and social benefits. For example, adolescents who regularly consume breakfast are more likely to have a healthy body weight and to achieve the recommended daily intake of vitamins and minerals.³

Research has shown a consistent relationship between indicators of healthy body weight and breakfast consumption. Two recent systematic reviews have also confirmed this association, concluding that children and adolescents who habitually consume breakfast have a lower likelihood of being overweight or obese.^{4, 5} Studies in adults also show that regular breakfast consumers, particularly those consuming cereals, tend to have a lower Body Mass Index (BMI) and are less likely to be overweight than those who do not eat breakfast cereals regularly.⁶ Conversely, breakfast skipping is associated with increased likelihood of being obese in British adolescents.⁷

The importance of breakfast for achieving adequate intakes of macro

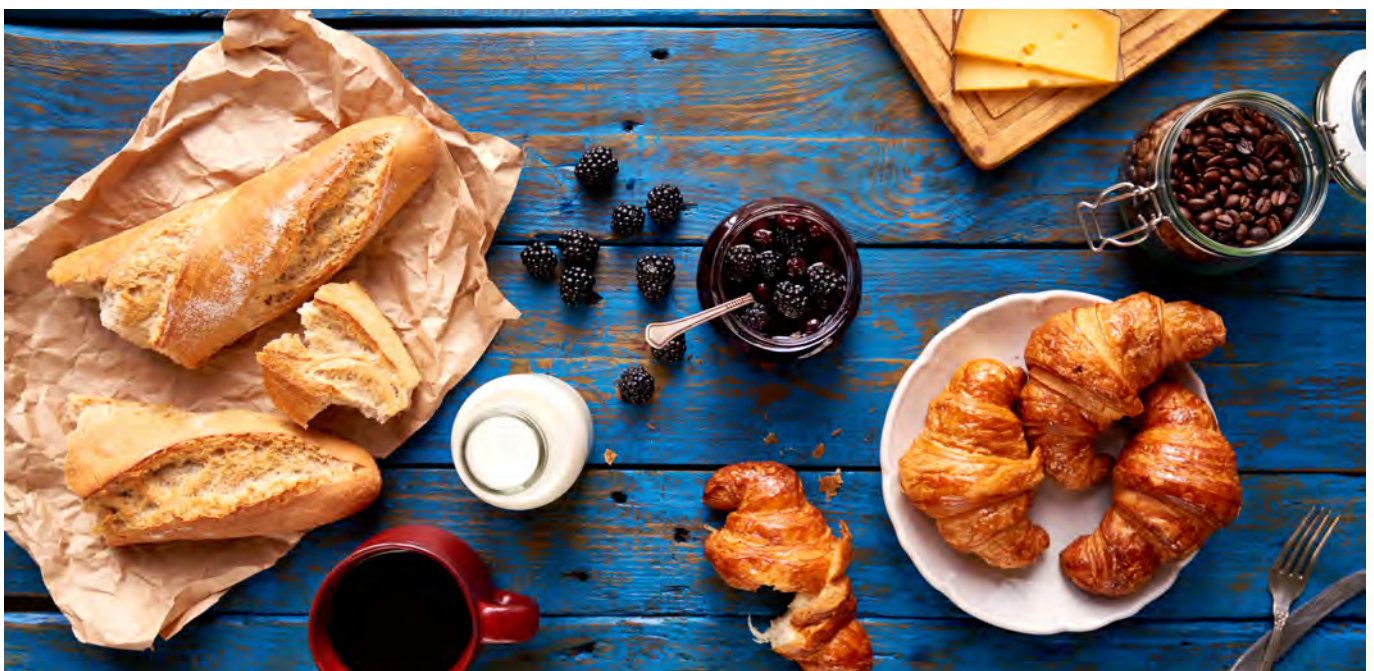
“Adolescents who regularly consume breakfast are more likely to have a healthy body weight”

and micronutrients has been highlighted in both adults⁸ and children and adolescents.⁹ These studies concluded that breakfast cereal consumption was associated with better micronutrient status including calcium, vitamin D, folic acid, iron and fibre.

“Breaking the fast” after the overnight fasting period by consuming breakfast kick starts metabolic processes and replenishes glycogen stores.¹⁰ Children and adolescents have higher sleep demands, which can deplete glycogen stores overnight.¹¹ Hence breakfast consumption may help to provide adequate energy for the morning. Childhood and adolescence are also important stages for cognitive development and intense learning at school.^{12, 13} Since children sometimes – and adolescents¹⁴ often – skip

breakfast (as shown in this report) this may be an important issue for cognitive and academic performance. Indeed, systematic reviews have shown a beneficial effect of breakfast on cognitive performance in children and adolescents and an association of habitual breakfast consumption with both on task behaviour in the classroom and actual academic outcomes.^{15, 16, 17}

Although some of the associations between breakfast intake and positive nutritional, psychological and behavioural outcomes may be attributed, at least in part, to the effects of socio-economic factors, interventions that increase the consumption of breakfast may play a significant role in improving public health and well-being.

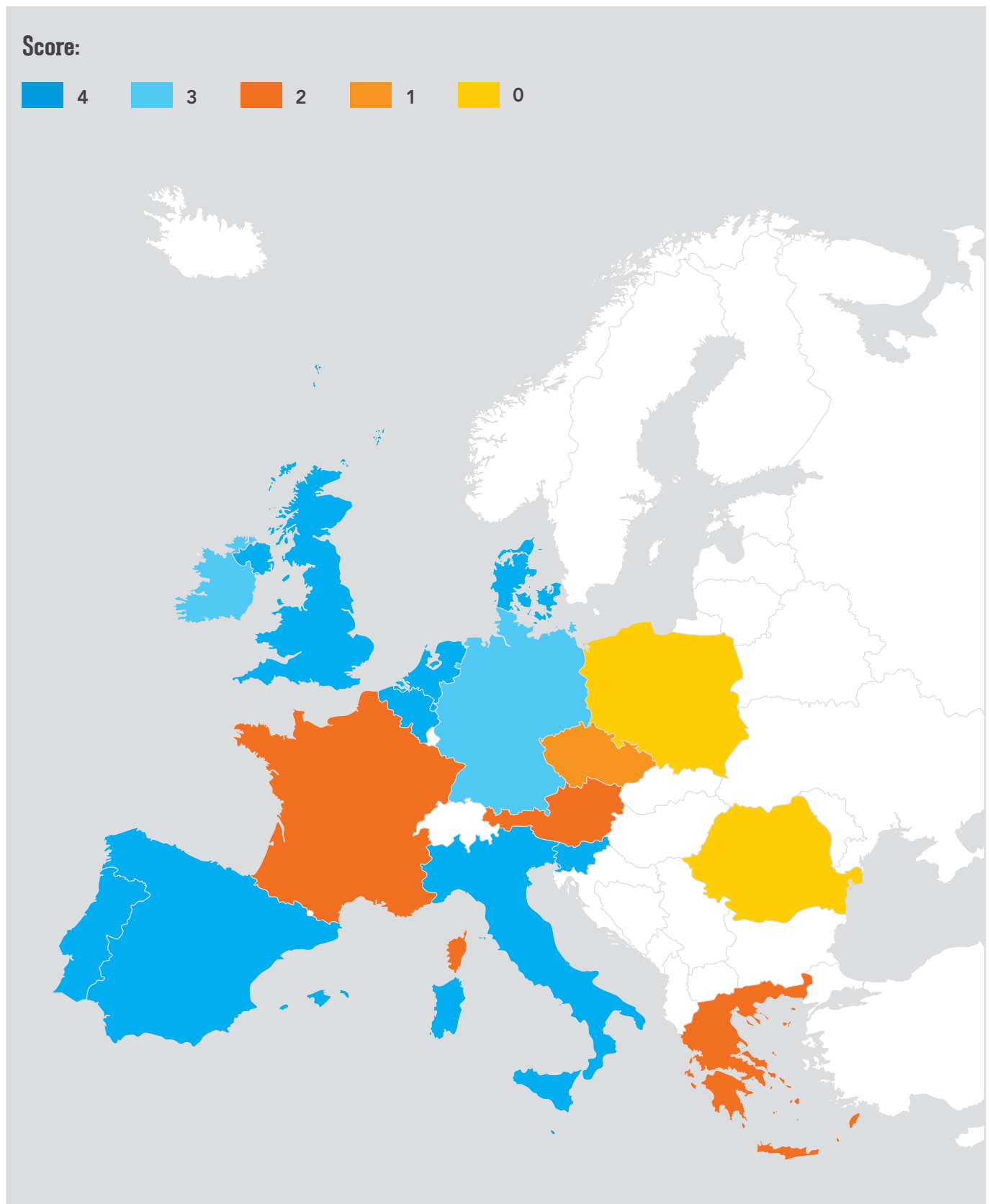




Part 2

Country Research and Review

Country Score Map



Country Research and Review

Each country review that follows is split into three sections:

1. **Key Findings:** generally publically available breakfast consumption data, particularly in the context of breakfast skipping.
2. **Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns:** an examination of the publically available nutrition and health guidance, policies, campaigns, initiatives and monitoring of the governments of 16 Member States of the European Union in relation to breakfast consumption.

This examination is set against four criteria, chosen because they are easy to understand and compare:

1. **Does the Ministry of Health or another national ministry reference the importance of breakfast in its official documentation or communications?**
 2. **Does the Ministry of Health or another national ministry actively monitor and measure breakfast consumption data as a key indicator of health and well-being?**
 3. **Is the information provided by public authorities on breakfast consumption and related health and lifestyle aspects clear and user-friendly?**
 4. **Does the government organise or support ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits?**
3. **Analysis:** a government's overall performance (the "score") when set against these criteria allows us to draw parallels (whenever possible) to the breakfast consumption data presented in the "Key Findings" section and to look at whether or not the government can do more to encourage and promote breakfast consumption.

The country reviews that follow provide valuable insight into the extent to which national governments regard breakfast consumption as a matter of general health and wellness. This report will therefore be a useful resource for national authorities to evaluate the current status of policy and strategy, suggesting where improvements can be made, as well as best practices, models and tools which can be adopted from the better-performing countries.

“Half of all countries surveyed met all four criteria, and top performers can be found in both northern and southern Europe.”

Austria

Key Findings

The latest WHO Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study published in 2016 shows that 62% of both 11-year-old girls and boys have breakfast every weekday in Austria. By the age of 15, this figure falls to 42% for girls and 52% for boys.¹

According to a 2013 market research study on the breakfast behaviour of 500 Austrians representing the general public (ranging in age from 14 to 65 years old and with varying degrees of education), only five of those surveyed claimed they never eat breakfast while 61% of those who eat breakfast claimed to do so every day. The study also found that breakfast incidence increases with age. Half of the breakfast-eaters surveyed agree or strongly agree with the statements that breakfast is the most important meal of the day (23% disagree or strongly disagree) and that they enjoy breakfast because it tastes good, whether it is healthy or not (26% disagree or strongly disagree with

this statement). 38% either agree or strongly agree with the statement that they pay attention to a balanced and healthy breakfast (28% either disagree or strongly disagree). 31% agree or strongly agree with the statement "I have no appetite in the morning" (half

disagree or strongly disagree). One in four respondents who eat breakfast at least once a week agree or strongly agree that they have "no time for breakfast" (54% disagree or strongly disagree).²

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



“Half the breakfast-eaters surveyed agree or strongly agree with the statement that breakfast is the most important meal of the day.”

Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

The Austrian government has made healthy eating a priority in its agenda, putting in place a comprehensive overview and action plan to inform consumers of all ages of the importance and benefits of balanced diets and healthy lifestyles, including a focus on breakfast. The Ministry of Health's website provides many examples of user-friendly content supporting this messaging, including the Austrian Food Pyramid,³ an online game,⁴ recipes (including breakfast) and other brochures.⁵

The Ministry's "National Nutrition Action Plan" includes a specific mention of breakfast in the context of eating habits of children.⁶ In 2011, on the basis of data that every third child eats very little or nothing at all for breakfast, the Ministry implemented the Austria-wide "Our School Buffet" (*Unser Schulbuffet*) initiative, which aims to ensure that healthy food options are made available to schoolchildren in the form of small shops at school, so that they have the energy they need to sustain their productivity throughout the day. As

part of the initiative, participating school buffet operators are provided with a toolbox containing healthy eating guidelines accompanied by the easy to understand pictorial Austrian Food Pyramid, onsite consulting and a dedicated online communications platform: www.schulbuffet.at.⁷ Breakfast itself, however, is not provided at Austrian schools.

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

2 Meinungsraum. Eigenstudie Frühstück. (2013). Available from: http://www.meinungsraum.at/downloads/MR_Cash_Fr%C3%BCkst%C3%BCck_042013.pdf.

3 bmfg.gv.at, Die Österreichische Ernährungspyramide. Available from: <http://www.bmfg.gv.at/home/Ernaehrungspyramide>.

2/4

- ✓ Ministry of Health or other ministry references the importance of breakfast
- ✗ Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being
- ✓ Information is clear and user friendly
- ✗ Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits

Did you know...

61%²

of those who eat breakfast
claimed to do so **every day**

Surveyed people claim:

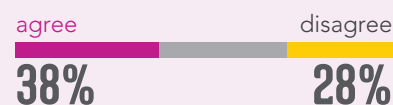
breakfast is the most important
meal of the day



I enjoy breakfast because it tastes
good, whether it is healthy or not



I pay attention to a balanced and
healthy breakfast



I have no appetite in the morning



I have no time for breakfast



Analysis

The WHO HBSC study shows that the consumption of breakfast among children in Austria is below average with the percentage of 13- and 15-year-olds who eat breakfast every school day ranking in the bottom seventh of all countries surveyed. After reviewing the most recent National Nutrition Action Plan and other Ministry of Health initiatives and publicly-available information, it appears that the Austrian government has taken concrete action

to try to improve these statistics by laying the foundations for a consistent, healthy approach to diet. However, breakfast consumption could play a more prominent role in the Ministry's communications, and it does not seem that the government has put in place the means to actively measure breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being in their drive to improve public health.

4 bmgf.gv.at, Onlinespiel Esspaar. Available from: http://bmgf.gv.at/home/Schwerpunkte/Ernaehrung/Onlinespiel_Esspaar/.

5 bmgf.gv.at, Rezepte/Broschüren/Berichte. Available from: http://bmgf.gv.at/home/Schwerpunkte/Ernaehrung/Rezepte_Broschueren_Berichte/.

6 bmgf.gv.at, Nationaler Aktionsplan Ernährung - NAP:e / 2013. Available from: http://www.bmgf.gv.at/cms/home/attachments/1/1/7/CH1047/CMS1471773335591/nap_e_20130909.pdf.

7 bmgf.gv.at, Unser Schulbuffet. Available from: http://bmgf.gv.at/home/Schwerpunkte/Ernaehrung/Unser_Schulbuffet/.

Belgium

Key Findings

The 2016 WHO HBSC study shows that Belgium's Flemish Community has a high level of breakfast consumption among children: 79% of 11-year-old girls and 80% of 11-year-old boys, and 55% and 70% of 15-year-old girls and boys respectively have breakfast every weekday. The French Community, on the other hand, has an average breakfast consumption level: 65% of girls and 73% of boys aged 11, and 50% of girls and 59% of boys aged 15.¹

The Belgian National Food Consumption Survey was organised for the second time in 2014 and 2015 surveying 3200 people aged 3 to 64 with the aim of improving the health of the Belgian population. The Survey was conducted at the request of the Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health and co-funded by the Federal Public Service – Public Health, Safety of the food chain and Environment, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the Scientific Institute of Public Health. The results show that 78% of the Belgian population has a daily breakfast (minimum 5 times per week). Women have breakfast more regularly (82%) than men (74%). This proportion is the highest among young children (3-9 years old) (90%) and declines rapidly among adolescents (14-17 years old) (67%) and among young adults (18-34 years old) (69%). The rate increases to 83% among the oldest population group (51-64 years old). The rate of regular breakfast consumption is higher in Flanders (81%) than in Wallonia (73%). People with a normal BMI have breakfast more regularly (81%) than those who are overweight (75%). The percentage of people having breakfast regularly was found to increase with the level of education.²

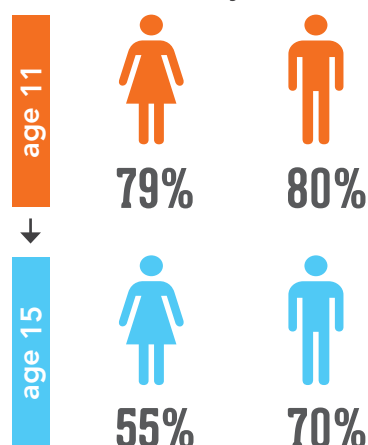
From 2011 to 2012 over 50,000 Belgians participated in the "Belgian Breakfast Survey" (*De Belgische Ontbijt Enquête/ Grande Enquête sur le petit déjeuner des*

Belges) – the largest survey of this kind ever conducted in Belgium, answering questions concerning their breakfast eating habits. Bread products and coffee were found to be the most popular breakfast products, consumed by 87% of respondents. The survey found that breakfast is largely viewed as the most important meal of the day with up to 76% of Belgians claiming to eat it daily. However, only one out of three choose to eat a complete breakfast (in accordance with health recommendations), which is defined as one milk product, one cereal- or grain-based product and one fruit.

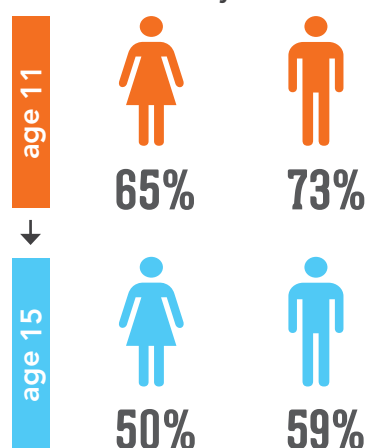
WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday

Flemish Community



French Community



The results indicated that one out of four Belgians do not have breakfast every day, and around 10% consume it only on the weekend. Breakfast skipping was attributed to lack of appetite, lack of time and habit.³

According to the Irish Food Board (Bord Bia) "PERIscope 2013 Belgian Consumers & Their Food"—a biennial study whereby research was conducted among a representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18 and above in Belgium—43% of Belgians said they rarely have time to eat a proper breakfast. The study also found that "sitting down together as a family for breakfast every morning" is achieved by approximately one-third of Belgian adults with a further third able to do this at weekends only.⁴

A more recent breakfast behaviour survey conducted in 2014 among 500 Belgian adults found that 59% of Belgians claim they eat breakfast every day, while 12% skip breakfast altogether. The reasons cited for skipping breakfast are lack of time (18.2%) and lack of appetite (19.7%).⁵

Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

In 2005, the Belgian Federal Public Minister of Health, Food Chain Safety and the Environment outlined the "National Food and Health Plan" (*Nationaal Voedings- en GezondheidsPlan/Plan National Nutrition et Santé pour la Belgique*), or NFHP, for the period 2005 to 2010. Its objective was to sensitise the Belgian population on the importance of adopting good dietary habits and lifestyles as a first step in the fight against obesity and non-communicable diseases. The plan featured nutritional guidelines and recommendations for diet, physical activity and health. Although the report

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

2 Belgian National Food Consumption Survey. Available from: <https://fcs.wiv-isp.be/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

3 Nutella. (2012). La Grande Enquête sur le petit déjeuner des Belges [Press release]. Available from: <http://breakfastisbest.eu/docs/cp-resultats-enquete.pdf>.

4 Bord Bia, Irish Food Board. (2013). PERIscope 2013. Belgian Consumers & Their Food - Full Report. Available from: <http://www.bordbia.ie/industry/manufacturers/insight/publications/bbreports/PERIscope6/PERIscope2013FinalReports/Periscope%207%202013%20Belgium-Final%20Report.pdf>.

does not specify the importance of breakfast as a key health measure, the nutritional recommendations emphasise an increase in the intake of fruit and vegetables, as well as whole grain and high fibre products.⁶

However, in the NFHP's youth-focused "General Guide for a Healthy Diet" (*Guide général: Vivement recommandé pour jeunes et moins jeunes*), breakfast is highly recommended as a key contributor to health and well-being. The guide identifies the importance of breakfast for physical and cognitive development, as well as a clear link between breakfast skipping and obesity.⁷ Comprehensive and reader-friendly brochures, studies and other documents are made available on the official website in four languages: French, Dutch, German and English (although not all documents are available in all languages).⁸ In addition to nutritional tips, NFHP initiatives and campaigns emphasise the importance of other aspects of health, including the importance of physical activity and a balanced diet. In 2013, activities previously undertaken by the NFHP were fully delegated to the different regions and communities within Belgium.⁹

4/4

- ✓ Ministry of Health or other ministry references the importance of breakfast
- ✓ Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being
- ✓ Information is clear and user friendly
- ✓ Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits

Analysis

While the Belgian Ministry of Health, Food Chain Safety and the Environment does reference the importance of breakfast, the NFHP ran from 2005 to 2010. It also appears that as of 2013, the priority of these activities at national level were lowered, transferring the ongoing implementation of these initiatives to regional level. These programmes are now promoted and enforced at local level with different regions and communities responsible for their individual outreach and implementation. Although this renders them more difficult to monitor and evaluate, it nevertheless may make them more efficient and sustainable

since they might better target the relevant local population. The government's Belgian National Food Consumption Survey reflects the importance it places on monitoring the health of its people. Overall, Belgium scores highly compared to its European counterparts in the promotion of breakfast as a contributor to public health, though regional differences in breakfast consumption can be observed – the Flemish Community is ranked in the top tier among all HBSC countries surveyed, while the French Community is close to, but still under, the HBSC average.

Did you know...

78%²

claim to eat breakfast
daily

breakfast skipping attributed to:³



lack of
time



lack of
appetite



habit

43%⁴

of adults rarely
have time to eat a
proper breakfast

12%⁵

of adults
skip breakfast



reasons for skipping breakfast:



18.2%
lack of
time



19.7%
lack of
appetite

5 Health and Food. (30 October 2014). Les habitudes matinales des Belges. Available from: <http://www.healthandfood.fr/article/2301/show>.

6 Plan National Nutrition et Santé pour la Belgique 2005-2010. Available from: <https://www.infor-allaitement.be/sites/default/files/PNNS-B%20DEF.PDF>.

7 Plan National Nutrition Santé. (2005). Guide général: Vivement recommandé pour jeunes et moins jeunes. Une Initiative du Plan National Nutrition-Santé pour la Belgique 2005-2010. Available from: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-as664f.pdf>.

8 health.belgium.be, Publications et recherche, Alimentation. Available from: [https://www.health.belgium.be/fr/publications-et-recherches?f\[0\]=field_download_subject%3A1107](https://www.health.belgium.be/fr/publications-et-recherches?f[0]=field_download_subject%3A1107).

9 alimentationdequalite.be, Allouer les moyens nécessaires au plan nutrition et santé.

Available from: <http://www.alimentationdequalite.be/livre-blanc/ameliorer-gouvernance/allouer-les-moyens-necessaires-au-plan-nutrition-et-sante.html>.

Czech Republic

Key Findings

Results obtained from the latest WHO HBSC study show that while children in the Czech Republic are behind their European peers in terms of skipping breakfast, their breakfast consumption rates are improving. The study found that at the age of 11, 66% of boys and girls report eating breakfast every weekday. By the age of 15, this figure falls to 53% for boys and 44% for girls, placing the Czech Republic in the bottom fifth of all 42 countries or regions surveyed.

Unfortunately, there is no available information on breakfast consumption for Czech adults.¹

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



Analysis

The WHO HBSC study concludes that breakfast consumption among children in the Czech Republic is below average. As children get older, breakfast skipping becomes more prevalent, placing the Czech Republic in the bottom fifth of all countries surveyed. The government has made

Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

A 1999-2000 study of the prevalence of obesity among 3,362 7 to 11-year-olds across 38 public schools in the Czech Republic found that 63% of all children surveyed ate breakfast, whether they live in large towns or rural areas, and that the majority of children consumed a mid-morning snack at school that they brought from home. It also revealed that children with excessive body weight were less likely to have breakfast (only 54.1% ate breakfast) than those with "low" body weight (75.3% ate breakfast).²

In 2004, the Czech government introduced "Health Education" as a new educational field into the public school educational curriculum for nursery school, primary, and secondary education. Nutrition education plays a key role in the curriculum which aims to develop lifelong positive and healthy behaviours in students which would be maintained into adulthood.³ However, there is no explicit reference to breakfast in the curriculum, nor on government websites (e.g. the Ministry of Health).

As outlined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its *Reviews of Health Care Quality: Czech Republic 2014*, significant progress has been made in improving the quality of health

“Children with excessive body weight are less likely to have breakfast than those with “low” body weight.”

care, however, compared to its peers, quality monitoring and improvement activities remain at a basic level. The OECD encourages the national health system to develop a more proactive approach to managing chronic diseases such as diabetes. Prevalence of diabetes in the Czech population is estimated at 8% and rising, higher than the OECD average of 6.9% (2013). Obesity rates are also increasing.⁴

consumption numbers in the context of high rates of obesity and chronic disease, it can be argued that the Czech government should promote the consumption breakfast in its health policies.

¹ Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

² Kovářová M, Vignerová J, Bláha P, Ošancová K. (2001). Bodily characteristics and lifestyle of Czech children aged 7.00-10.99 years, incidence of childhood obesity. Central European Journal of Public Health, 10(4): 169-173. Summary available from: http://www.prolekare.cz/en/czech-slovak-pediatrics-article/bodily-characteristics-and-lifestyle-of-czech-children-aged-7-0-to-10-99-years-prevalence-of-childhood-obesity-in-26751?confirm_rules=1.

1/4

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- ✗ Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being
- ✗ Information is clear and user friendly
- ✓ Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits

Did you know...



only
54.1%²

of children with **excessive body weight** eat breakfast



75.3%

of children with **"low" body weight** eat breakfast

Prevalence of **diabetes** in the Czech population

8% ↑⁴
and rising

(OECD average: 6.9%)



Obesity
rates also
increasing

3 Koptíková J. (2010). The Curriculum of Health and Nutrition Education in Czech Republic. Available from: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=nebeducator>.

4 OECD. (2014). OECD Reviews of Health Care Quality: Czech Republic 2014: Raising Standards, OECD Publishing. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264208605-en>.

Denmark

Key Findings

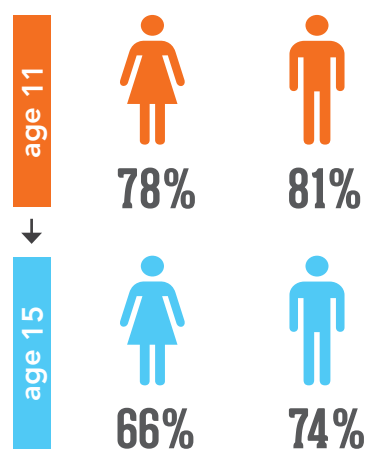
The WHO HBSC study shows that 78% of 11-year-old Danish girls and 81% of 11-year-old boys consume breakfast every weekday. This proportion decreases in 15-year-olds: 66% of girls

and 74% of boys have breakfast on a daily basis during the school week. Nonetheless, Denmark is well above WHO HBSC averages for 11- and 15-year-olds, ranking tenth and third respectively among the 42 countries and regions surveyed.¹

(among adults) was found in the 18-24 age group, where 75% of women eat breakfast every day compared to 63% of men. This breakfast consumption gender gap notably decreases with age; of those age 65 and above, 93% of men and 94% of women eat breakfast daily.^{3,4}

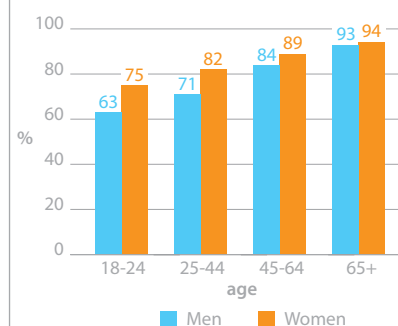
WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



The 2007-2008 "Danish Health Examination Survey" (DANHES) and the 2009 "Diet, Smoking, Alcohol and Exercise" (*Kost, Rygning, Alkohol og Motion, or KRAM*) study together comprise the largest nationwide health study of the Danish adult population: 76,484 Danes completed a basic questionnaire and 18,065 participated in a health examination.² The study found that 81.6% of respondents reported having breakfast every day and women of all ages tended to eat breakfast more regularly than men (see chart). The greatest gender difference

Percentage of men and women by age group that reported eating breakfast every day as per the 2009 KRAM study



Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

The DANHES and the KRAM studies were initiated by the former Danish National Council for Public Health, conducted by the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH) of the University of Southern Denmark, and funded by the Ministry of Interior and Health and the Tryg Foundation. Following a large reform in 2007, Danish municipalities took over the responsibility for disease prevention and health promotion and DANHES was established to prioritise and focus on this new task.⁵

The KRAM report contains an entire chapter dedicated to meal habits with an important focus on breakfast habits (Chapter 12: "Meal Patterns - What does it mean to skip breakfast?") stating that the Food Administration recommends eating three healthy meals

a day "because the body does best with an even supply of energy" and that a "healthy and hearty breakfast is believed to reduce the risk of unhealthy eating during the day". The data also demonstrates a relationship between skipping breakfast and an increased risk of overweight; a high proportion of those who were overweight did not eat breakfast every day. The KRAM study authors agree, however, that it is not possible to conclude from the data that breakfast skipping leads to obesity, or whether those who are overweight skip breakfast in an attempt to lose weight by consuming fewer calories.

The Danish Government has a number of articles and other information on the importance of breakfast made readily available to the greater public in a

user-friendly way via various institution and agency websites.

The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration (DVFA),⁶ part of the Ministry of Environment and Food (created in the summer of 2015 as a result of the fusion between the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark),⁷ is responsible for food safety and health "from farm to fork". "All about diet: food, meals, and exercise" (*Alt om kost*) is a DVFA initiative and website where the greater public can find information on official dietary recommendations, food and exercise, including posters and links to other documents. The website has sections dedicated only to breakfast and clearly outlines the benefits of eating breakfast, stating that eating

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HBSC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

2 Eriksen L, Grønbaek M, Helge JW, Tolstrup JS, Curtis T. (March 2011). The Danish Health Examination Survey 2007-2008 (DANHES 2007-2008). *Scand J Public Health* 39 2: 203-211.

3 Bjørk Petersen, C. National Institute of Public Health. University of Southern Denmark. (October 2009). KRAM-undersøgelsen i tal og billeder. Chapter 12, p 129.

4 Si-folkesundhed.dk, Flere Ældre End Yngre KRAM-Deltagere Spiser Morgenmad. Available from: http://www.si-folkesundhed.dk/Ugens%20tal%20for%20folkesundhed/Ugens%20tal/06_2009.aspx?lang=da.

5 National Institute of Public Health. Tryg Fonden; University of Southern Denmark. KRAM. The Danish Health Examination Survey 2007-2008, Methods and variables. Available from: http://www.si-folkesundhed.dk/upload/kram_metode_rapport_2011.pdf.

breakfast improves learning, for children in particular, and recommends that breakfast should be offered in schools as some children arrive at school without having eaten.⁸ It also provides breakfast recommendations and makes available relevant scientific studies and reports, leaflets and other articles.⁹

Other more general healthy eating initiatives have been initiated by the Ministry of Environment and Food, including the Nordic Keyhole label (in cooperation with the Norwegian and Swedish Food Authorities), which indicates food that complies with certain “healthy” requirements in relation to the content of fat, sugar, salt or dietary fibre, therefore aiding consumers in making healthier choices as part of official dietary recommendations.¹⁰ Another initiative is the whole grains logo, promoting public health by encouraging Danes to eat more whole grains, from breakfast onward.¹¹ The logo was developed by the Danish Whole Grain Partnership, a public-private partnership formed by the DVFA, the Danish Cancer Society, the Danish Heart Foundation, the Danish Diabetes Association, the Danish Association of Clinical Dieticians, and a series of food companies. The Partnership’s website cites the importance of breakfast as part of a healthy lifestyle and diet for all ages, and also lists projects that support, encourage and cite the benefits of healthy eating at breakfast time. Breakfast recipes using whole grain products are also made readily available on this website.¹²

“Culinary Culture” (*Madkulturen*) is an independent institution also under the Ministry of Environment and Food that focuses on quality growth in the food industry, ensuring “better food for all”. Various documents that address breakfast as part of a healthy diet are available on its website.¹³

4/4

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Analysis

Denmark scores very highly in terms of regular breakfast consumption across all age groups when compared to most other nations. The Danish government cites a large number of official and academic references as regards breakfast consumption and its benefits, as well as the positive effect breakfast has on cognitive performance in children and the ideal composition of breakfast, actively recommending that breakfast be consumed, by children in particular. Throughout many sections

of the official government websites—and through initiatives and campaigns such as *Alt om kost*, the Danish Whole Grain Partnership and the whole grains logo – there is a constant public-facing reminder of the importance of a healthy breakfast. The accessible information shows that the Danish government do measure breakfast as a key contributor to health, however more recent studies initiated by the government could be undertaken.

6 fødevarestyrelsen. Available from: <http://www.foedevarestyrelsen.dk/>.

7 Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark. Available from: <http://en.mfvm.dk/>.

8 altomkost.dk, Morgenmad til skolebørn.

Available from: <http://altomkost.dk/deofficieleanbefalingertilensundlivstil/kommuner-skoler-og-institutioner/skoler-gammel-skolemad/morgenmad-til-skoleboern/>.

9 altomkost.dk, Morgenmad. Available from: <http://altomkost.dk/tips/til-maaltiderne/morgenmad/>.

10 altomkost.dk, Nøglehullet. Available from: <http://altomkost.dk/noeglehullet/>.

11 altomkost.dk, Fuldkornslogoet. Available from: <http://altomkost.dk/tips/paa-indkoeb/fuldkornslogoet/>.

12 fuldkorn.dk, Morgenmad og brunch. Available from: <http://www.fuldkorn.dk/opskrifter/302-morgenmad-og-brunch>.

13 madkulturen.dk, Madkultur?. Available from: <http://madkulturen.dk/>.

France

Key Findings

The 2016 WHO HBSC study reports daily breakfast consumption percentages on school days among French 11-year-olds at 76% for girls and boys; percentages that fall to 46% and 64% respectively by age 15.¹

These findings are consistent with the general decline of breakfast consumption observed in France since 2003. Surveys conducted by the Research Centre for the Study and Observation of Living Conditions, or CRÉDOC (*Centre de Recherche pour l'Étude et l'Observation des Conditions de Vie*), show a general drop in breakfast consumption across all age groups over the last decade. For children aged 3-12, this decline was relatively small. Daily consumption fell from 91% in 2003 to 87% in 2010. A similar decline was noted in adults over 20 years old, where percentages fell from 91% in 2003 to 86% in 2010. However, the decline is considerably more pronounced among adolescents. Between 2003 and 2007, the proportion of individuals within the 13 to 19-year-old group eating breakfast daily fell

sharply from 79% to 54%, although it exhibited a slight rise in 2010 reaching 59%.²

According to a 2015 CRÉDOC study, teachers believe children skip breakfast for the following reasons: family context—for example, if a parent leaves for work before the child and the child doesn't get into the habit of eating breakfast (reason cited by 68% of the 500 surveyed teachers), waking up too late (47%), no appetite (17%) and socio-economic reasons (17%).³

According to the Irish Food Board (*Bord Bia*) "PERIscope 2015 French Consumers & Their Food" – a biennial study whereby research was conducted among a representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18 and above in France – 39% of French adults rarely have time to eat a proper breakfast. The study also found that the proportion of adults never sitting down for breakfast as a family for breakfast has decreased from 21% in 2010 to 15% in 2015.⁴

A 2014 survey of just over 1,000 French adults conducted by IPSOS for Matins Céréales, the association of breakfast and ready-made cereals in France, found that the two main reasons why the French skip breakfast are lack of time (42%) and lack of appetite (39%). However, 26% of those interviewed said they would be willing to get up earlier to start their day with breakfast.⁵

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

Health is an active issue in France, receiving consistent political attention. With regard to nutrition, the "National Health and Nutrition Programme" (*le Programme national nutrition santé*), first launched in 2001, was updated in 2011 with the focus of reducing social inequalities, obesity, sedentary lifestyles, nutrition tendencies and improving dietary habits.⁶ These objectives are supported by monitoring key health indicators, including weight, life expectancy and sugar and salt intake. However, the policy document makes no direct reference to breakfast

in this context. There is little nutritional advice on the Ministry of Health's website, which instead focuses on providing statistics and information on past and current campaigns and programmes.⁷ As part of its actions, the Ministry developed and launched "Eat Move" (*Manger Bouger*), a multi-stakeholder science-based campaign that provides detailed information on nutrition and well-being. Limited advice related to breakfast appears under the "Eat Better" (*Manger Mieux*) section, and although advice is given as to the composition of a healthy breakfast so

that the body has enough energy for the day, and between three and four meals a day are recommended (always including breakfast), there is no mention of the importance of breakfast as a key health indicator.⁸ That there are benefits to eating breakfast is briefly mentioned in the National Health and Nutrition Programme's 2002 "Food Guide For All" (*La Santé vient en mangeant: le Guide alimentaire pour tous*).⁹ Besides this, there is currently no proactive promotion of breakfast consumption by the French Health Ministry or other related bodies.

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2/4



Ministry of Health or other ministry references the importance of breakfast



Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being



Information is clear and user friendly

Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits

“ Surveys conducted by CRÉDOC show a general drop in breakfast consumption across all age groups over the last decade. ”

Analysis

Although the French government has a number of ongoing programmes looking to promote healthy diets, lifestyles and physical activity such as “Eat Move” (Manger Bouger), the fact that breakfast consumption and its benefits do not feature in the National Health and Nutrition Programme for 2011-2015 suggests that this meal is not a current priority for the French Health Ministry agenda. Despite the clear interest of the Ministry to sensitise the French population to the obesity epidemic and impact on life expectancy, it is surprising that breakfast plays little role in the overall campaign for healthier lifestyles and that no major activity or

initiative dedicated to promoting the importance of breakfast has taken place in the last decade. With the increasing number of scientific studies and healthcare professionals that actively advocate breakfast as a key contributor to improved health and prevention of obesity and related diseases, there is a clear opportunity for the French Health Ministry to re-evaluate its position on breakfast promotion and initiatives. It will therefore be interesting to see if breakfast will be promoted in the new National Health and Nutrition Programme which is likely to be initiated in 2018.

Did you know...

39%⁴

of adults **rarely** have time to eat proper breakfast

reasons why the French skip breakfast:⁵



lack of time

42%



lack of appetite

39%

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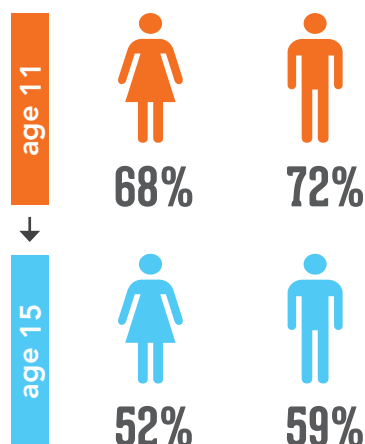
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Germany

Key Findings

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



The latest WHO HBSC study shows that within the 11-year-old group, 68% of German girls and 72% of boys consume breakfast every weekday. These percentages fall to 52% and 59% respectively among the 15-year-old group.¹

A survey of 1001 German adults commissioned in 2007 by the *Deutsche Angestellten-Krankenkasse (DAK)*, a German health insurance company, showed that the higher the age, the more likely German adults are to consume breakfast daily. Among 18-29-year-olds, only 52% eat breakfast daily, while 93% of those 60 years old and above eat a daily breakfast. As an average across all age groups, 72% of German adults eat breakfast every working day, while 17%

do not eat breakfast at all, citing the following reasons: a perceived lack of time (53% on average), no appetite (51% on average), and because they do not want to eat too many calories (7% on average).²

According to the Irish Food Board (*Bord Bia*) "PERIscope 2015 German Consumers & Their Food"—a biennial study conducted among a representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18 and above in Germany—34% of German respondents declared that they sit down as a family every morning to eat breakfast, with weekends being the most popular time to sit down to have breakfast together. 42% reported to rarely have time to eat a proper breakfast, which is 9% points lower than the 2010 study results.³

Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

In Germany, governmental nutritional information pertaining to breakfast is mainly available through the Federal Ministry of Health and the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection.

In 2008, these ministries produced the National Action Plan entitled "IN FORM", promoting healthy diets and physical activity, aiming to introduce lasting improvements in dietary and exercise habits in Germany by 2020, with an explicit objective to reduce overweight and obesity. In Germany in 2013, 66% of men and 51% of women aged between 18 and 80, and 15% of children and adolescents (up to 17 years old) were overweight or obese. Despite the rise in the proportion of overweight and obese German individuals in recent years, the only mention of breakfast consumption in this action plan is the following: "Children can only perform

to the best of their ability if they enjoy a balanced, adequate diet. As, however, one in four children do not eat breakfast before going to school [...] there is a need for action."⁴ Nevertheless, there are a number of initiatives listed on the IN FORM website⁵ that focus on healthy eating and lifestyles, and some mention breakfast, such as "FIT KID – the Healthy Eating Action for Nursery Schools" (*FIT KID – Die Gesund-Essen-Aktion für Kitas*), which aims to enhance the quality of food served to children in nursery schools, including breakfast, lunch and other food breaks.⁶ Another example is the "Bio-Brotbox Network", an initiative to raise the value and perception of nutrition with the following stated aims relating to breakfast: "Every child should have breakfast every day", "Breakfast should be healthy" and children "should appreciate the value of a healthy diet" as well as the quality and origin of food. Under this action, which is coordinated

without state funding by volunteers at schools using products, funds and services donated by companies, first year students are awarded a reusable breakfast bowl with ingredients from local organic agriculture. In 2002, the 70 Bio-Brotbox groups produced 175,000 Bio-Brotboxes which were distributed to a quarter of all first year pupils in Germany.⁷

In addition, some of Germany's federal states have taken action to promote the importance of breakfast. Lower Saxony's IN FORM web portal provides both children and adults with recommendations on breakfast.⁸ Baden-Württemberg's initiatives "Conscious Child Nutrition" (*BeKi - Bewusste Kinderernährung*) and "Join the Healthy Boat" (*Das gesunde Boot*) promote breakfast and healthy eating among children, as well as physical activity for the latter.^{9, 10, 11} Bavaria is also a strong

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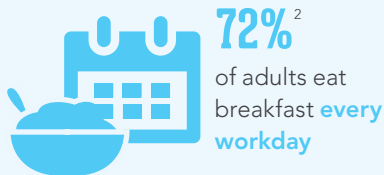
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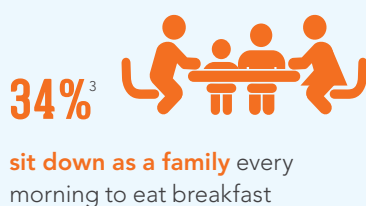
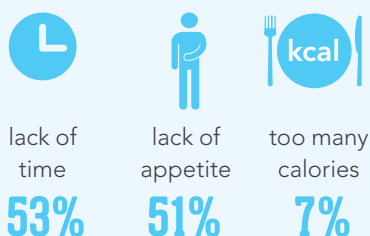
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Did you know...



breakfast skipping attributed to:



3/4

- ✓ Ministry of Health or other ministry references the importance of breakfast
- ✗ Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being
- ✓ Information is clear and user friendly
- ✓ Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits

supporter of nutrition. Its Consumer Information System aims to ensure that children eat breakfast¹² and another Bavarian government initiative brings breakfast to schools for needy children.¹³

In terms of federal government sponsored initiatives, it does not appear that there have been any recent health and nutrition policy developments since the implementation of IN FORM in 2008, even though its priorities were reviewed in 2014. At national level, there is currently more of a focus on healthy eating, rather than an explicit focus on breakfast.

Analysis

Overall, breakfast consumption among the German population is average compared to other countries. In a pattern similar to other European countries, the peak age for skipping seems to be in the teenage and young adult years, while skipping is less frequent in young children and the elderly. The German government and federal states have many healthy eating initiatives, several of which aim to raise awareness of the benefits of regular breakfast consumption. While some of these programmes and actions could serve as models for other countries, more could be done to actively monitor breakfast consumption behaviour and measure the results of the impact of these programmes..

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Available from: <https://www.in-form.de/profiportal/projekte/projekte/projekt Datenbank/projekte/fit-kid-die-gesund-essen-aktion-fuer-kitas.html>.

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Greece

Key Findings

While estimates of breakfast consumption across Greece vary depending on social characteristics and age range, statistics are consistently low. The 2016 WHO HBSC study found that only 57% of Greek 11-year-old girls and 56% of 11-year-old boys eat breakfast every weekday—these being the second lowest figures of all European countries surveyed. These breakfast consumption figures fall to 47% and 54% respectively by age 15.¹ A 2010 study published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* found that at age 18 these percentages remained low, with just 44.1% of girls and 48.8% of boys eating breakfast daily.²

The “National Action Plan for Public Health 2008-2012” reported that 52% of Greek adults had breakfast at least every other morning, while one third of respondents never or rarely consumed breakfast.³ The government’s “National Action Plan for Nutrition and Eating Disorders 2008-2012” refers to a study on the eating habits of 1,305 children aged 3-18 whereby fewer than half the respondents ate an “adequate” breakfast,⁴ while 14% did not eat breakfast at all. The study also found that one in four adolescents (aged 16-18) left home in the morning on an empty stomach.⁵

A 2013 study of 40,000 students nationwide was conducted under the “National Action Plan on Public Health: Impact, Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity – Exercise and Healthy Diet” to record the prevalence of obesity in the school population and its association with socio-economic, demographic and nutritional factors as well as factors related to physical activity, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of schoolchildren and their parents. The study concluded that 63.7% of girls and 60.7% of boys consume

breakfast daily; a statistically significant lower percentage of adolescents (12-16 years old) consume breakfast daily compared to pre-adolescents (10-12 years) and children (6-10 years) (51.5%, 63.6% and 69.1% respectively); daily breakfast consumption rates decrease with increasing age of parents; the daily percentage of breakfast consumption increases with the father’s education level; children who grow up with both parents consume breakfast daily at a higher percentage than children of single-parent families (62.6% vs. 58.4%); and, when both parents work, children consume breakfast daily at a higher rate than children with two unemployed parents (62.5% and 53.6%).⁶

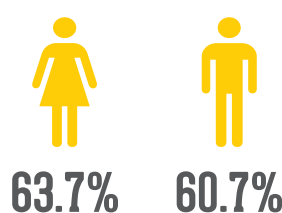
WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



National Action Plan on Public Health⁶

% of schoolchildren who eat breakfast daily



Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

The National Action Plan on Public Health: Impact, Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity – Exercise and Healthy Diet⁷ was developed because studies showed that Greek children were ranked first in obesity among European countries, and there was a need to analyse the prevalence of obesity in Greece in order to implement preventive intervention measures. The Plan, developed by the Department of Endocrinology – Growth and Development of the Athens General Children’s Hospital, P. & A. Kyriakou, was co-funded by the European Union and the Hellenic Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity under the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) 2007-2013⁸ and involved the implementation of education and health promotion actions among the pediatric population across the country, according to research into the determinants of public health. The main objective was to change knowledge and behaviors, and to improve the quality of life of the youth population of Greece with the ultimate goal of reducing the prevalence of obesity. A series of screening, prevention, health education and public health promotion of children and adolescents was put in place, including the afore-mentioned 2013 study with data on breakfast consumption.

The website of the National Action Plan on Public Health: Impact, Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity includes a FAQ section containing information and advice on obesity, healthy living and nutrition, including practical suggestions for healthy choices as part of a balanced diet, stating, “breakfast is one of the most important meals of the day since it offers the necessary energy and nutrients to the child to start the day properly”. It also gives examples of the composition of a nutritious breakfast.

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people’s health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HBSC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

2 Relationship between Eating Behavior, Breakfast Consumption, and Obesity among Finnish and Greek Adolescents. (2010). *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Society for Nutrition Education 42 6: 417-421. Available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20729150>.

3 Εθνικό Σχέδιο Δράσης για τη Δημόσια Υγεία 2008-2012 [National Action Plan for Public Health 2008-2012]. pp 95-96.

Available from: <http://www.moh.gov.gr/articles/health/domes-kai-draseis-gia-thn-ygeia/ethnika-sxedia-drashs/95-ethnika-sxedia-drashs?fdl=230>.

4 NB: An “adequate” breakfast is defined as including a dairy product or a fruit/juice and at least one more food item from a different food group.

5 Εθνικό Σχέδιο Δράσης για τη Διατροφή και τις Διατροφικές Διαταραχές 2008-2012. [National Action Plan for Nutrition and Eating Disorders 2008-2012]. p 32.

Available from: <http://www.moh.gov.gr/articles/health/domes-kai-draseis-gia-thn-ygeia/ethnika-sxedia-drashs/95-ethnika-sxedia-drashs?fdl=231>.

The National Committee for Nutrition Policy, established in 2016 by the Greek Health Ministry and comprised of academic expert members, is tasked with creating a National Nutrition Policy for the protection and promotion of national public health, proposing and evaluating programmes and actions on the prevention of chronic diseases linked to nutrition, providing an opinion on draft nutrition- and health-related legislation, forming nutrition action plans according to the National Dietary Policy and the recommendations of the European Commission and the World Health Organization, as well as the adoption of dietary standards and nutrition guidelines, among other things.⁹ The Committee recently approved National Nutrition Guidelines for youth, adults, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and people aged 65 and over, which include healthy breakfast suggestions and recommendations. The Guidelines state for adults: “systematic consumption of breakfast is associated with healthier eating habits, better physical and mental health at all ages, lower risk of obesity and chronic illnesses, but also reduced stress, better performance and fewer mistakes and injuries in the working environment”, and for children: “skipping breakfast has been associated with fatigue and decreased concentration, affecting performance in school”, encouraging parents to be a good example by eating a healthy breakfast with their children.¹⁰

The Institute for Children’s Health, a public health institute under the Ministry of Health and Welfare, provides a Children’s Health Booklet for all new mothers, which includes the same type of breakfast recommendations.¹¹ In addition, nurseries provide breakfast, and Greek legislation sets specific nutritional standards for this meal.¹²

2/4



Ministry of Health or other ministry references the importance of breakfast



Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being



Information is clear and user friendly



Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits

Analysis

Greece has clearly taken action to try to reverse alarming obesity trends. One such manner is the regular reference of the importance of a healthy breakfast as part of the government’s nutrition and dietary recommendations and other materials. Repeating the 2013 study on the prevalence of obesity in the school population as part of the National Action Plan on Public Health: Impact, Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity – Exercise and Healthy Diet, which also included breakfast consumption statistics, would be a means of continuing to monitor the health of the Greek population and to measure the effectiveness of the actions undertaken by the government and

its National Committee for Nutrition Policy. While the information provided in the Nutrition Guidelines and in the Children’s Health Booklet is easy to understand and widely distributed, a centralised website or section on the Ministry of Health’s website grouping this type of material as well as other health initiatives and programmes, brochures, posters, studies, etc. would perhaps make it even easier and more user-friendly for individuals seeking dietary and health-related advice. The government is currently undertaking additional public health and nutrition initiatives and actions – perhaps some of these suggestions will be implemented in the near future.

Did you know...

52%³

of adults eat breakfast
at least every other morning



1/3

of adults **never or rarely**
consume breakfast

6 This information and data from the 2013 study conducted under the National Action Plan on Public Health: Impact, Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity – Exercise and Healthy Diet was provided by the Directorate of Public Health of the Hellenic Ministry of Health.

7 Εθνικό Σχέδιο Δράσης για τη Δημόσια Υγεία: Αποτύπωση, Πρόληψη και Αντιμετώπιση της Παιδικής Παχυσαρκίας. Available from: <http://www.paidiaskisidiatrofi.gr/>.

8 Hellenic Republic Ministry of Economy, Development & Tourism, What is the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF). Available from: <http://2007-2013.espa.gr/en/Pages/staticWhatIsESPA.aspx>.

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11 Ινστιτούτο Υγείας του Παιδιού. Available from: <http://ygeiapaidiou-ich.gr/vivliario-ygeias-paidiou>.

12 ΕΦΗΜΕΡΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΥΒΕΡΝΗΣΕΩΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑΣ, ΥΠΟΥΡΓΙΚΕΣ ΑΠΟΦΑΣΕΙΣ & ΕΓΚΡΙΣΕΙΣ. Available from: http://www.et.gr/idoscs-nph/search/pdfViewerForm.html?args=5C7QrtC22wFWG2Ogb2ANFndtvSoClrL8Y8a1mBc4Gbt5MXDOLzQTLf7MGgcO23N88knBzLCmTXKaO6fpVZ6Lx3UnKI3nP8NxdnJ5r9cmWjYWelD-vWS_18kAEHATUkJb0x1LidQ163nV9K--td6SluaeVR8T5WwzscYpduANLIEFGSWhaFvthBdXnn00TFR0.

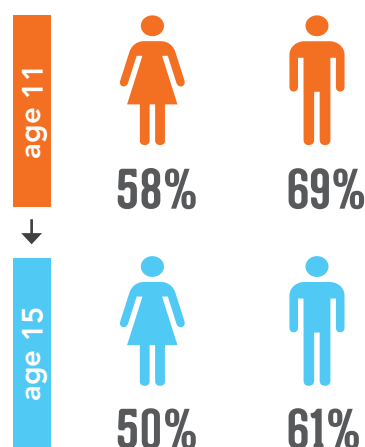
Italy

Key Findings

The latest WHO HBSC study found that, at age 11, 58% of Italian girls and 69% of boys eat breakfast every weekday. By age 15, this falls to 50% and 61% respectively. Apart from the first figure which is well below the HBSC average of all 11-year-old girls surveyed (i.e. 70%), these percentages come close to the HBSC study gender averages.¹

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



According to the 2016 results by *OKkio alla Salute* (an Italian play on words meaning “Watch Your Health”) – a biannual national surveillance system funded by the Ministry of Health/CCM, coordinated by the National Centre for the Prevention of Diseases and Health Promotion of the Higher Institute of Health and conducted in collaboration with all Italian regions and the Ministry of Education, University and Research that measures childhood obesity and collects information on weight, dietary habits, physical activity and sedentary behaviours – 8% of the 48,946 8- and 9-year-old Italian schoolchildren surveyed skip breakfast (down from 11% in 2008/2009) and 33% regularly eat an inadequate/unbalanced breakfast (up from 28% in 2008/2009).²

A 2013 survey of more than 1,000 Italians over the age of 15 found that 9 out of 10 Italians eat breakfast regularly. The survey also found that Italians skip breakfast for the following main reasons: no appetite when they first wake up (50%), a preference to eat something later (47%), a preference to eat a heartier lunch (37%) and lack of time (34%).³

A 2014 survey of more than 9 million Italian households found that 1 in 3 families eat breakfast together regularly, if not every day. It found that only 5% of adolescents and young adults aged 15-24 skip breakfast, while 7% of children aged 5-14 do not have breakfast. The survey also revealed that children are 50% more likely to consume breakfast if their parents do. Favourite breakfast items that were identified in the survey were biscuits, cereals and muesli, and bread or crackers.⁴

A recent survey conducted on a representative sample of 1,000 Italians confirmed that 9 out of 10 Italians eat breakfast every day, usually at home (93%). 7% of the population were found to be “breakfast skippers” (those who skip breakfast regularly or occasionally). While 83% of Italians believe breakfast is unquestionably a good habit, 17% say skipping breakfast is not a problem and 15% believe that eating breakfast while dieting is counterproductive.⁵

Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

In 2007, the Italian Ministry of Health created the “Gaining Health - Making healthy choices easy” (*Guadagnare salute - Rendere facili le scelte salutari*) campaign, which is a cross-sectorial strategy aimed at tackling the most prominent non-communicable diseases that are linked to common risk factors such as tobacco use, alcohol consumption, poor diets and lack of physical activity.⁶

In 2010, a teaching kit and user manual was developed by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the National Institute of

Health and the National Institute for Nutrition (INRAN) for distribution to primary schools as part of the wider Gaining Health programme. The importance of breakfast featured alongside the importance of a healthy and balanced diet and the need to lead an active lifestyle. The strategy highlights the benefits of not skipping breakfast, such as increased energy and improved concentration throughout the day. Recommended breakfast items promoted by the kit include milk, yogurt, biscuits, bread, breakfast cereals and fresh fruit.^{7, 8, 9}

In February 2014 on an episode of a respected and popular television talk show, *Porta a Porta*, entitled “How we eat today”, the Minister of Health Beatrice Lorenzin underlined the importance of the Gaining Health awareness campaign, in part due to the high percentage of Italian children who skip breakfast or do not have breakfast regularly, as well as the increasing numbers of obese and overweight children. Consequently, one third of the Ministry of Health’s national plan is dedicated to children and to general education on healthy eating and living.¹⁰

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

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4 Io comincio bene. (2014). La Prima Colazione? Fa bene alla famiglia 1 volta su 3 ci si riunisce al gran completo e' il pasto simbolo del dialogo tra genitori e figli. Available from: http://www.breakfastisbest.eu/docs/2016/Ricerca_AIDEPI_DOXA_2014.pdf.

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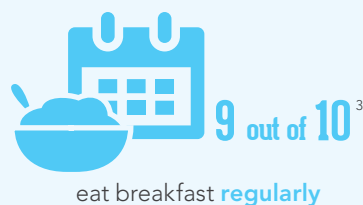
- ✓ Ministry of Health or other ministry references the importance of breakfast
- ✓ Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being
- ✓ Information is clear and user friendly
- ✓ Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits

Analysis

While the consumption of breakfast among Italian children is around the WHO HBSC average, Italy performs better than many other European countries when promoting a healthy breakfast. The Italian government clearly addresses the issue of skipping breakfast as part of a greater health awareness plan and has been actively promoting the importance of breakfast as part of its nutritional and health campaigns. Overall, there is a good delivery of public-facing information on the health benefits of breakfast.

Did you know...

breakfast skipping attributed to:



no
appetite

50%



preference to eat
something later

47%



preference to eat
a heartier lunch

37%



lack of
time

34%

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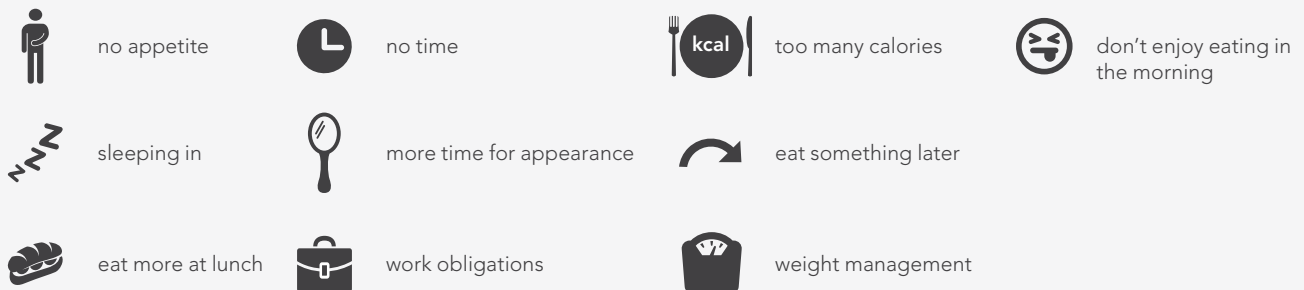
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Available from: <http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-43b325dd-af61-4eff-b050-e2dfe81acd2f.html>.

Commonly cited reasons for skipping breakfast*

Legend:



Austria



31%



25%

Belgium



19.7%



18.2%

France



42%



39%

* According to the research in this report. Accompanying information and references are provided in the corresponding country chapters.

Germany



53%



51%



7%

Republic of Ireland



38%



37%



29%



25%

Italy



50%



47%



37%



34%

The Netherlands



36%



32%

Romania



36%



23%

Spain



United Kingdom



33%



27%



26%

The Netherlands

Key Findings

According to the latest WHO HBSC study, the Netherlands has the highest proportion of 11-year-old children who eat breakfast every weekday in Europe: 90% of girls and 92% of boys. For 15-year-olds the Netherlands is second only to Portugal: 75% of Dutch girls and 79% of boys eat breakfast every weekday.¹

Similar results were reported in the 2011 “Dutch National Food Consumption Survey”, whereby data of children and adults (aged 7 to 69) was collected between 2007 and 2010 as part of the Dutch dietary monitoring system: daily breakfast consumption percentages were reported at 94% for children aged 7 to 8 years old, around 89% in the 9 to 13-year-old group, and an average of about 75% of 14 to 18-year-olds. This percentage decreased during adolescence and early adulthood. According to the data, almost one in two men and one in three women between 19 and 30 years old did not have breakfast every day. In people over 30 years old, breakfast was more

popular; in the eldest adult group (51-69 years old) between 81% and 87% had breakfast daily. Overall, more adults than children ate breakfast four to six days a week. However, 1-5% of children and 4-12% of adults reported that they (almost) never ate breakfast.²

A 2012 online survey conducted among 1,053 households across the Netherlands by the National School Breakfast Association found that one in five families did not have breakfast every day, however the results showed that families were increasingly aware that it is good to have breakfast every day. 78% of those surveyed believed that breakfast provides a good start to the day, 74% agreed that it's a good source of energy, and 72% said that it's good for digestion. The most cited reasons for skipping breakfast were: sleeping in (36%), no appetite in the morning (32%) and lack of time (19%).³

According to the Irish Food Board (*Bord Bia*) “PERIscope 2015 Dutch Consumers & Their Food”—a study

in which research was conducted in a representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18 and above in the Netherlands — 32% of the Dutch claim that they rarely have time to eat a proper breakfast, however, 6 in 10 Dutch adults reported sitting down together as a family for breakfast either every morning or at weekends.⁴

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

The Netherlands Nutrition Centre (Stichting Voedingscentrum Nederland)—the leading organisation funded by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport providing science-based and independent information towards consumers^{5,6}—created the “Five a Day” (Schiif van Vijf) campaign as far back as 1953. Five a Day is a set of recommendations akin to a food pyramid suggesting which food groups and the general quantities of these that one should consume daily.⁷

While the Five a Day initiative does not specifically focus on breakfast consumption, it represents a long-standing understanding among Dutch policymakers of the importance of diet and positive behaviours in public health.

In 2002, an initiative entitled “National School Breakfast” was launched by the Bread Information Centre with the support of the Dutch government. The initiative is a one week annual event where children have breakfast together at school complemented by educational

programmes about why breakfast is good for them using interactive tools. In 2016, over 520,000 children from 2,720 primary schools took part in the initiative.⁸ Politicians, athletes, royalty and celebrities also take part in and promote this campaign which garners huge amounts of publicity in the Netherlands, thus further reinforcing the government’s stance on the importance of eating breakfast.

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people’s health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf

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Analysis

Breakfast has been given significant attention by the Dutch government: for decades the government has led on-going campaigns and initiatives for the dissemination of information on healthy eating habits, including a specific focus on the health benefits of breakfast consumption. The annual breakfast-focused awareness week includes the participation of well-known and popular public figures, appealing to a greater audience and encouraging their active involvement. These efforts have likely contributed to the fact that the Netherlands maintains the highest levels of breakfast consumption among children and adolescents in Europe.



Did you know...



78%³

agree that breakfast provides a **good start** to the day



74%

agree that breakfast is a good source of **energy**



72%

agree that breakfast is good for **digestion**

breakfast skipping is attributed to:



sleeping in
36%



no appetite
32%



lack of time
19%

4 Bord Bia, Irish Food Board. (2015). PERIscope 2015. Dutch Consumers & Their Food - Full Report. Available from: <http://www.bordbia.ie/industry/manufacturers/insight/publications/bbreports/PERIscope6/PERIscope2015FinalReports/Periscope2015-NetherlandsFullReport.pdf>.

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Poland

Key Findings

The latest WHO HBSC study found that 70% of 11-year-old girls and 72% of 11-year-old boys have breakfast every weekday; percentages which are in line with the HBSC gender averages of 70% for girls and 73% for boys of this age. For the 15-year-old age group these figures fall to 56% for girls and 62% for boys, which are also close to the HBSC averages of 52% for girls and 62% for boys of this age.¹

According to the results of a study published in 2011 in the *Annals of Agricultural and Environmental Medicine* based on a survey of 1,341 rural schoolchildren aged 9-13, almost 17% of those surveyed do not eat breakfast before going to school in the morning. There is, however, a slight gender discrepancy: 86.6% of the male school children surveyed admitted to eating breakfast, compared to 80.3% of the

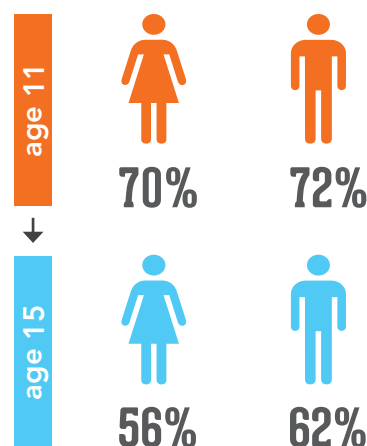
female school children.² A survey among 14,000 older students (aged 13 to 19) conducted by the Polish Society of Dietetics found that more than 40% of Polish students in this age range go to school without having had breakfast.³

Another study published in the *Annals of Agricultural and Environmental Medicine* in 2012, based on a survey of 14,511 adolescents and young adults from Polish high and secondary schools and universities, found that about 30% of respondents did not eat breakfast. This same study also reviewed population studies carried out in Poland assessing the occurrence of overweight and obesity among children, concluding that these indicate that the younger generation does not possess adequate knowledge to make healthy nutritional choices. Furthermore, it states that the most frequent undesirable nutritional

behaviours among adolescents are skipping breakfast, snacking between main meals and an insufficient number of daytime meals.⁴

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

In 1963, the Polish Council of Ministers founded the National Food and Nutrition Institute (*Instytut Żywności i Żywienia*).⁵ The Institute is a leading research and development facility focusing on the prevention of diet-related diseases, nutrition rationalisation, and food quality and safety.⁶ Reports issued at the beginning of the 1990s demonstrated that the health levels of Polish citizens were much lower than those of other European countries. The "National Health Programme", or NHP (*Narodowy Program Zdrowia*), was set up in 1990 in response to the "Health for All by the Year 2000" strategy of the World Health Organization.⁷ It was the first attempt to unify the activities of governmental bodies, NGOs and local communities relating to protecting and improving the health of Polish people. Since then,

the NHP has been updated several times, with the latest strategy running from 2016 to 2020.⁸ The programme focuses on many different aspects of health, including the promotion of nutrition education and a healthy diet. However, breakfast remains absent from the strategy and advice on breakfast consumption, or promotion of such, is absent from the Ministry of Health website.

However, within the framework of the Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme, the National Food and Nutrition Institute and the Ministry of Health together with experts from the Academy of Physical Education and the Polish Society for Nutrition, among others, implemented the "Keep Balance" project and the "Nutrition and Physical Activity Friendly School /

Pre-school" certification programme in 1,600 educational institutions between 2013 and 2015 to combat a dramatic increase in obesity among youth. The project was co-financed by Switzerland with EU support (85% of funds) and the Polish Ministry of Health funding the remaining 15%. The main objective was the implementation of proper nutrition principles and increasing physical activity among children and teenagers through the development of healthy attitudes and, consequently, prevention of the development of overweight and obesity and other non-communicable diseases. The certification programme encouraged health-promoting institutions involving the entire school community. Several tools were made available to institutions, teachers, parents and students to assist in nutrition education and the

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

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4 Kapka-Skrzypczak L, et al. (2012). Dietary habits and body image perception among Polish adolescents and young adults – a population based study. *Annals of Agricultural and Environmental Medicine*, 19(2): 299-308. Available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22742806>.

Did you know...

30%⁴

of adolescents
and young
adults **do not**
eat breakfast

**most frequent undesirable
nutritional behaviours**
among adolescents are:



skipping breakfast



snacking between
main meals



insufficient number
of daytime meals

0/4

- ☒ Ministry of Health or other ministry references the importance of breakfast
- ☒ Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being
- ☒ Information is clear and user friendly
- ☒ Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits

achievement of criteria, including a website, posters, videos and brochures on the principles of proper nutrition and physical activity. One of the criteria established to assist institutions in the implementation of pro-health measures was the organisation of shared breakfasts in pre-schools, primary and junior high schools, as well as ensuring a sufficiently long breakfast break and a suitable place to eat. 65% of schools met all requirements and were thus certified. The subsequent evaluation of the programme indicated positive changes, including a 19% reduction in the percentage of children who were not eating breakfast before school and a 3% decrease in the prevalence of overweight among participatory primary school pupils. Children's knowledge about healthy eating also increased.^{9, 10, 11}

Analysis

The Polish government's full support of the Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme's "Keep Balance" project that ran from 2013-2015 and which includes the promotion of healthy breakfast habits in Polish schools is to be commended as a successful endeavor to educate Polish youth and their families in order to combat overweight and obesity. However, "Keep Balance" was only a short-term project, and the Polish Ministry of Health's public facing material and national health

plan currently lack any mention of or advice on breakfast consumption and its benefits. Given that the country's breakfast consumption statistics for youth are generally around the average compared to other countries and could therefore be improved, perhaps the government will build on the successes of this collaboration and certification project and encourage future such initiatives, as well as include a specific focus on the promotion of breakfast in its national health programme.

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6 eufic.org, Spotlight on... Polish National Food and Nutrition Institute. Available from: <http://www.eufic.org/article/en/show/spotlight/rid/polish-national-food-nutrition-institute>.

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10 DEDIPAC, Keep Balance. Available from: <https://www.dedipac.eu/toolbox/Keep%20Balance.html>.

11 Jarosz, M. (2016). Preventing overweight and obesity as well as chronic noncommunicable diseases through education of the society on nutrition and physical activity. Project KIK/34 in the Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme. Available from: http://breakfastisbest.eu/pdf/Poland_REPORT_KIK34_task_2_EN.pdf.

Portugal

Key Findings

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



Breakfast consumption percentages among young Portuguese children are among the highest in Europe according to the most recent WHO HBSC study, with 90% of boys and 91% of girls aged 11 eating breakfast every weekday. Although these numbers decrease as children get older—by age 15, 73% of girls and 86% of boys have breakfast every weekday—the decline is not as pronounced as it is in other European countries. In fact, among all HBSC surveyed countries, Portugal has the highest percentages of 15-year-olds that eat breakfast on weekdays and second highest for 11-year-olds.¹

Portugal also has some of the highest adult breakfast consumption levels in Europe. According to a survey of 1,000 adults from across the country conducted in 2009 by Kellogg Company, 91% of adults in Portugal eat breakfast every day.²

Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

Portugal is particularly proactive in the promotion of health and nutrition. The “National Programme for the Promotion of Healthy Eating”, or PNPAS (*Programa Nacional para a Promoção da Alimentação Saudável*), approved by the Ministry of Health in 2012, is developed, monitored and implemented by the Directorate General for Health. It aims to improve the nutritional status of the population, encouraging physical and economic availability of food, as well as the appreciation and enjoyment of eating, stating that “adequate food consumption and the improvement of the nutritional status of citizens has a direct impact on the prevention and control of the most prevalent diseases at national level (cardiovascular, oncology, diabetes, obesity)”.³ The PNPAS maintains a number of traditional and widespread nutrition educational tools, including a food pyramid, a food wheel and a “Five a Day” campaign.^{4,5,6}

The PNPAS has established a number of projects geared towards fostering beneficial nutritional behaviour, with the aim of replicating successful initiatives and extending them to other regions of the country.⁷ Particular attention is paid to children and positively influencing healthy behaviours as from a young age. Nutri Ventures, for example, an entertainment brand that promotes healthy eating in partnership with the Ministries of Health and Education and

Science, encourages children between the ages of 4 and 10 to maintain healthy diets in the context of the child obesity pandemic.⁸ Similarly, the “Back to School with Energy” project (*Regresso às Aulas com Energia*) has been conducted in partnership with the Directorate General for Health and Education, along with other partners, aiming to contribute to the reduction of the prevalence of childhood obesity by sensitising children, parents, guardians and teachers to healthy eating habits and regular physical activity, using educational games, easy recipes, as well as a book.⁹ Finally, the project “Eat Slowly and Well & Move too” (*Come Devagar e Bem & Mexe-te Também*) in collaboration with the Directorate General for Health aims to reduce and ultimately prevent obesity in young children by promoting healthy eating habits and physical activity in primary schools. The project’s focus group is the 2012-2013 academic class from one Lisbon primary school, with these same students being monitored over the course of four school years as they are taught different nutritional message each year: the importance of breakfast and snacks; the importance of drinking water and eating fruit and vegetables; the benefits of eating soup; and finally, learning to interpret food labels. These messages are always accompanied by a focus on the importance of exercise.¹⁰

“ Breakfast consumption percentages among Portuguese children and adults are among the highest in Europe. ”

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

2 Portal do Cidadão com Deficiência. (29 July 2009). A Importância do Pequeno-Almoço. Available from: <http://www.pcd.pt/noticias/ver.php?id=7769>.

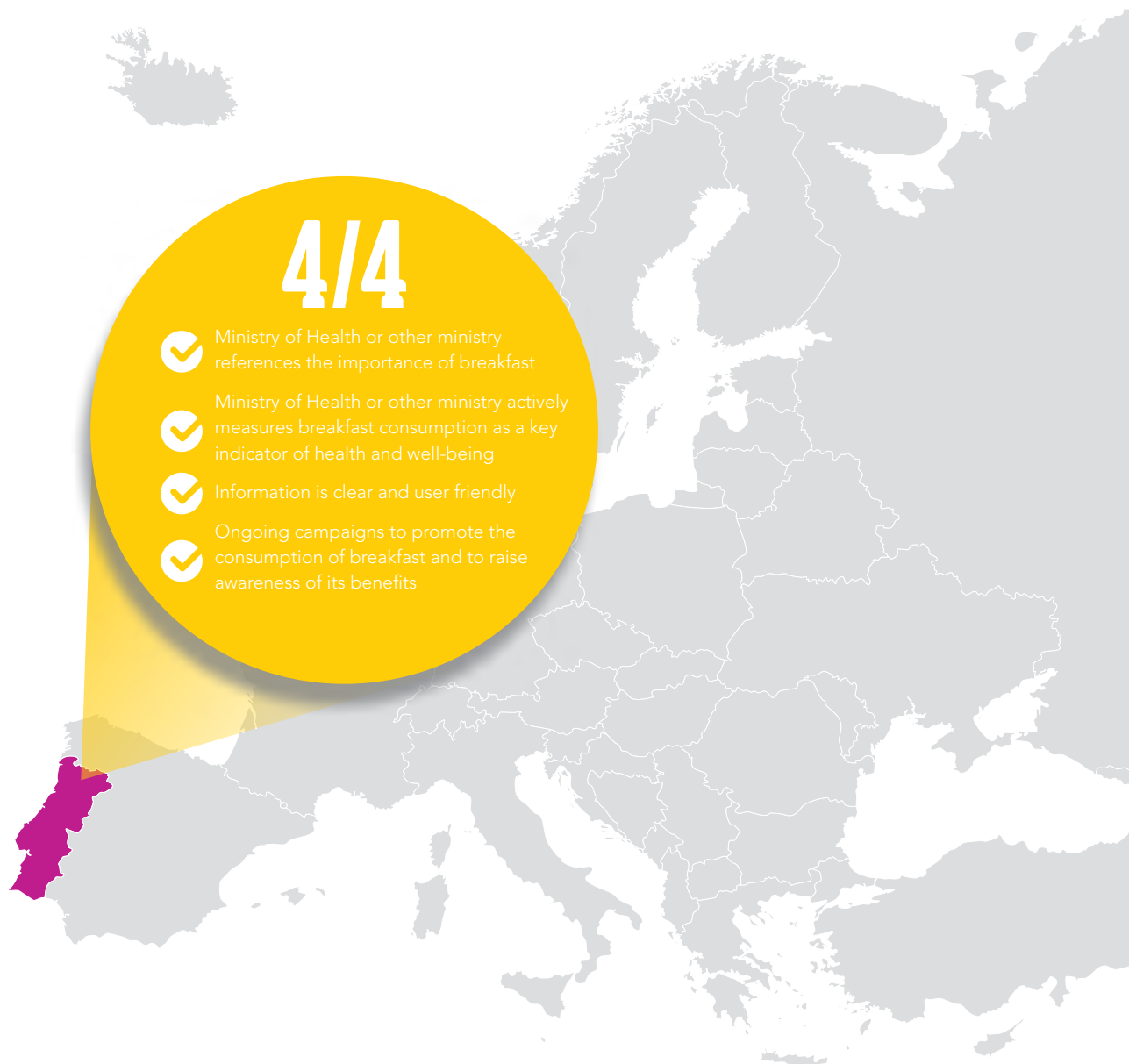
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7 Available from: <http://www.plataformacontraaobesidade.dgs.pt/PresentationLayer/conteudo.aspx?menuid=247&exmenuid=459&SelMenuId=247>.



Did you know...



91%² of adults
eat breakfast **every day**

Analysis

Portugal is particularly proactive in the promotion of health and nutrition, and has a large number of programmes and initiatives in place to promote healthy eating and nutrition behaviours. The Portuguese government specifically mentions the importance of healthy breakfasts in its “Eat Slowly and Well & Move too” project, which actively monitors the nutritional status of children and assesses the effectiveness of this awareness campaign on the practices carried out by them. The findings of this small study may well inform future policy. These and other initiatives may contribute to Portugal’s status as one of the top-ranking countries for breakfast consumption in Europe.

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Republic of Ireland

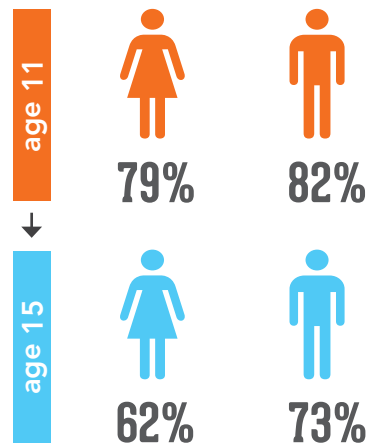
Key Findings

Results obtained from the WHO HBSC study show that Irish children achieve reasonable results in terms of not skipping breakfast vis-à-vis their European peers. The study found that at age 11, 82% of boys and 79% of girls had breakfast every weekday, which is well above the HBSC 11-year-old gender averages of 73% and 70%, respectively. By age 15 these figures fall to 73% for boys and 62% for girls; around 10 percentage points higher than the HBSC gender averages for this age group (i.e. 62% and 52% respectively).¹

The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey, funded by the Department of Health and undertaken in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for Europe, monitors and collects data from young people across the Republic of Ireland every four years since 1998.² The latest study (2014) found that 10% of boys aged 10-17 reported never having breakfast during the week compared to 15% of girls in the same age group, and that one in every five children (22%) reported going to school or to bed hungry because there was not enough food at home. The study concludes that “there are still worrying levels of children skipping breakfast”.³

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



Every year since 2014, the Department of Health commissions the Healthy Ireland Survey to monitor the health of the nation. 7,500 people aged 15 and over are interviewed, collecting data on physical activity, diet, nutrition and mental well-being, including how often respondents eat breakfast. The Healthy Ireland Survey 2016 found that almost three-quarters (74%) of all those surveyed eat breakfast every day of the week, with 4% indicating that they never eat breakfast. Just over half (54%) of women aged 15 to 24 eat breakfast every day, compared with 62% of men

of the same age. Regularity of breakfast consumption was found to increase with age.⁴

According to the Irish Food Board (*Bord Bia*) “PERIscope 2015 Irish & British Consumers & Their Food”—a biennial study whereby research was conducted among a representative sample of 1,008 adults aged 15 and above in the Republic of Ireland—49% of Irish respondents declared that they sit down as a family every morning to eat breakfast, while 35% declared that they rarely had time to eat a proper breakfast.⁵

The “Breakfast Report”, a 2010 study into breakfast behaviour, found that a third of Irish people skip breakfast, and for those in their 20s, this figure rises to 48%.⁶ The research showed that many people skip breakfast even though they feel better when they do not: 58% of those surveyed admitted to feeling happier and more energetic when they do eat breakfast. Of the breakfast-skippers, 37% cited lack of time as the reason, 38% claimed they are not hungry at that time of the day, 29% opted to stay in bed longer, and 25% preferred to spend time on their appearance instead.⁷

Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

In 2013, the Department of Health of the Republic of Ireland launched a flagship initiative “Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025”, which aims to improve health across all sectors of the population through policy, empowerment, reform and evaluation.⁸ A focus on research—mainly the aforementioned annual Healthy Ireland Survey, which contains breakfast consumption data—is an important

feature of Healthy Ireland to ensure that interventions, programmes, communication strategies and funding strategies are based on real evidence about the determinants of health and best practice approaches in addressing them.⁹ The Survey findings are a robust data source against which the Department of Health and its stakeholders can monitor, measure and evaluate progress in implementing various elements of the Healthy Ireland

Framework, and to inform policy, programme support and delivery, and enhance accountability.¹⁰ The Department of Health also funds the Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study mentioned earlier. Both major surveys’ breakfast skipping findings are referenced in the Government’s “A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016 - 2025”, stating that eating habits are not consistent with optimal health

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people’s health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

2 nuigalway.ie, HBSC Ireland, Background Information. Available from: <https://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/hbscireland/backgroundinformation/>.

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Did you know...

49%⁵


sit down as a family every morning to eat breakfast



35%

rarely have time to eat a proper breakfast


33%⁶

of Irish people skip breakfast

48%

of those in their 20s skip breakfast

and that there is considerable room for improvement in the Irish diet.¹¹

The Health Service Executive is an organisation that provides public health and social care services to everyone living in Ireland, and its Code of Governance is approved by the Minister for Health. Its website contains advice, recipes, brochures and other information on the benefits of breakfast as part of a healthy lifestyle.¹²

Safefood, an Irish public body that promotes awareness and knowledge of food safety and healthy eating, is very active in promoting positive breakfast eating habits, hosting on its website a wide range of relevant resources, including recipes, guides (e.g. "A Good Practice Guide for Breakfast Clubs"), studies, visual aids and other publications for parents and teachers in particular.¹³ While Healthy Ireland is a partner for some safefood campaigns, it does not appear to play a role in its breakfast-related efforts.

“ The Irish Department of Health recommends that people make time for breakfast every day. ”



Analysis

The HBSC statistics put the Republic of Ireland among the top performing countries in terms of adolescent breakfast consumption. In addition to funding a specific Irish HBSC study, the Department of Health's Healthy Ireland initiative maintains a national health measurement and evaluation mechanism that also includes breakfast consumption statistics on a yearly basis. Eating a daily breakfast is also recommended by the Irish Government in action plans, policy documents and

other collateral, also specifically as part of its plan to improve Ireland's health and reduce the burden of obesity. While the government clearly recommends eating breakfast as an indicator of health and well-being, it does not appear to contribute to any active public-facing breakfast-specific campaigns. This may be because civil society and producers (e.g. safefood) are effectively taking on the role of ensuring the ongoing promotion of healthy breakfasts for people of all ages.

5 Bord Bia. Irish Food Board. (2015). PERIscope 2013. Irish & British Consumers & Their Food – Full Report. Available from: <http://www.bordbia.ie/industry/manufacturers/insight/publications/bbreports/PERIscope6/PERIscope2015FinalReports/Periscope2015-ROlandGBFullReport.pdf>.

6 irishhealth.com, One in three skip breakfast. Available from: <http://www.irishhealth.com/article.html?id=17934>.

7 foodbev.com, A third of people in Ireland skip breakfast. Available from: <http://www.foodbev.com/news/a-third-of-people-in-ireland-skip-breakfast/>.

8 Department of Health. (2013). Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025. Available from: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/hieng.pdf>.

9 healthyireland.ie, Healthy Ireland Research. Available from: <http://www.healthyireland.ie/about/research/>.

10 healthyireland.ie, Healthy Ireland Survey. Available from: <http://www.healthyireland.ie/about/research/healthy-ireland-survey/>.

11 health.gov.ie, A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016 – 2025. Available from: <http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/A-Healthy-Weight-for-Ireland-Obesity-Policy-and-Action-Plan-2016-2025.pdf>.

12 Health Service Executive. Available from: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/>.

13 safefood.eu, Safe food – the Food Safety Promotion Board. Available from: <http://www.safefood.eu>.

Romania

Key Findings

According to the latest WHO HBSC study, 58% of 11-year-old girls and 57% of 11-year-old boys consume breakfast every weekday, while only 36% of 15-year-old girls and 40% of 15-year-old boys have breakfast every weekday. Romania ranks very low compared to the other 41 countries surveyed and is at the bottom of the list for 15-year-olds.¹

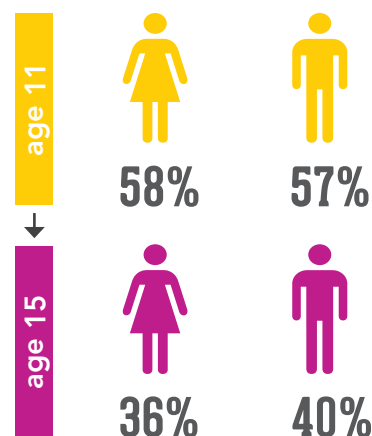
A 2011 study published in the Romanian academic journal *Review of Research and Social Intervention (Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala)* analysed nutritional behaviour among

109 Romanian teenagers and revealed that daily breakfast consumption was reported in over 64% of teens aged 17-19.²

A 2013 survey administered to over 800 Romanians aged 18-64 from urban areas found that more than half of those surveyed skip breakfast, primarily because of a perceived lack of time and because of work obligations. Other reasons that were given for not having breakfast included a lack of appetite in the morning (23%) and weight management (36%).³

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

It does not appear that the Romanian government has launched any independent comprehensive campaigns to improve the eating habits of its citizens, and no breakfast-related information could be found on the Ministry of Health's website. Similarly, no measures pertaining to breakfast were included among a range of 2008 reforms on nutrition, despite a focus on the provision of healthy foods for schoolchildren and the improvement of nutrition education.⁴ As part of its "National Health Strategy 2014-2020" (*Strategia Națională de Sănătate 2014-2020*), certain national public health priorities such as "Health Evaluation and Promotion of Health and Education" will be carried out in 2017 and 2018 by the Ministry of Health. Perhaps breakfast consumption will feature as part of the government's communications on and

monitoring of nutrition and healthy lifestyles.^{5, 6}

However, owing to European Union initiatives, some action has been taken by the Romanian government to encourage pupils to adopt healthier lifestyles, such as introducing the "School Milk Scheme" and the "School Fruit Scheme" in 2002 and 2010 respectively. These EU-wide schemes aim to distribute fruit, vegetables and milk in schools and increase education about healthy eating in general, although there is no specific mention of breakfast. The School Milk Scheme reached some 1.9 million Romanian school children in the 2014-2015 school year, and 7,200 schools were estimated to have participated in the voluntary School Fruit Scheme in the 2015-2016 school year, reaching just over 1.77 million students.^{7, 8}

Analysis

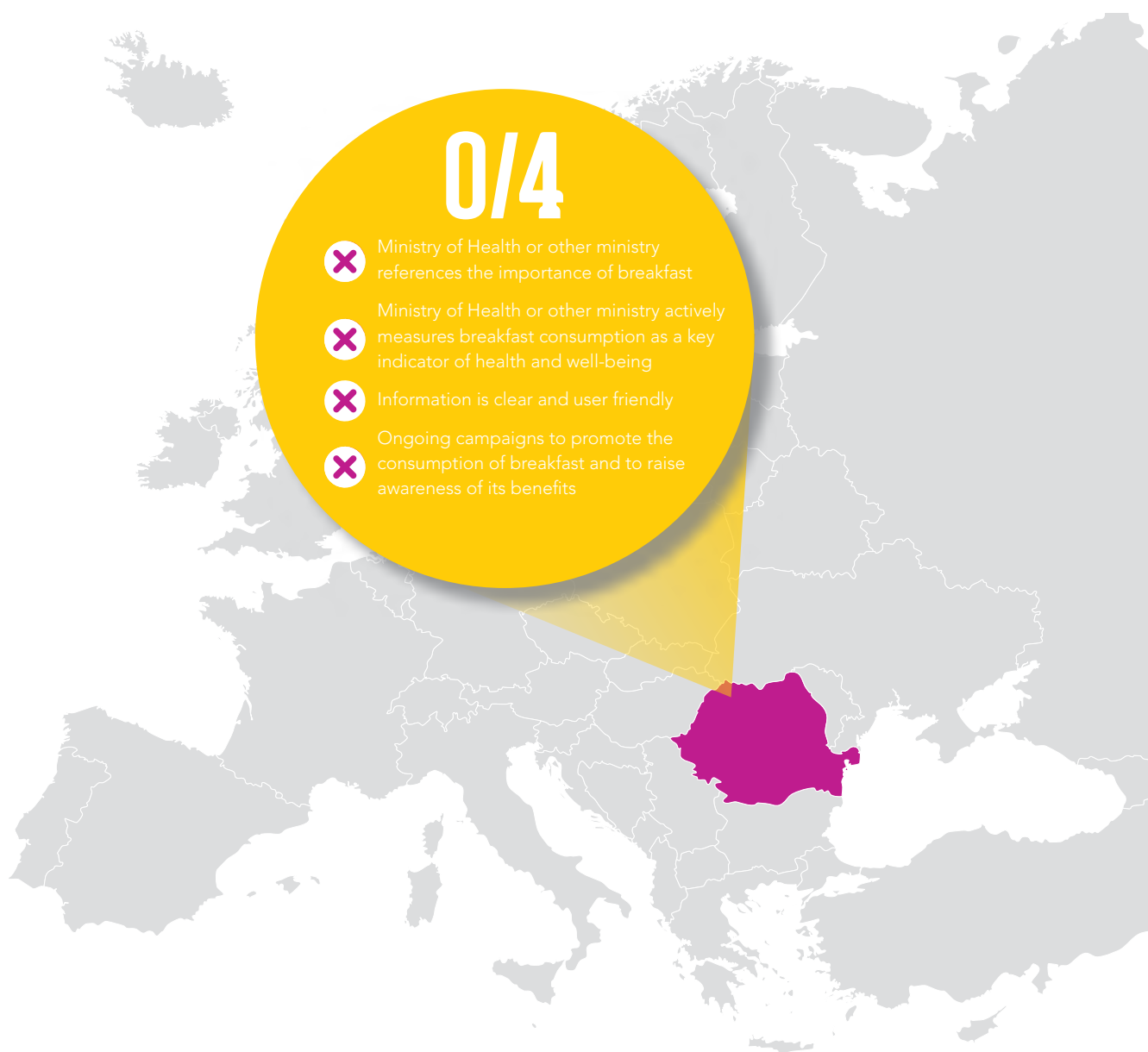
Romania's very low statistics on breakfast skipping are alarming. The Romanian government's efforts to improve both education concerning healthy breakfast habits and access to it have been limited, with no apparent mention of breakfast in present policy guidelines, although perhaps the government's current health priority planning will come to include this. Nevertheless, lifestyle changes in younger generations and their increased awareness and desire for healthy food could help boost the Romanian authorities to encourage breakfast consumption as part of a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

2 Vintila I. (2012). The Impact of Food Behaviour, Lifestyle and Societal Influences in the Health & Emotional Status of a Romanian High School Population. *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala* 37: 130-143.

3 Smark Research. (2013). In bucataria romanilor. De la raft la farfurie. Available from: <http://research.smark.ro/in-bucataria-romanilor-de-la-raft-la-farfurie>.

4 Ene C. (2014). Government Programs for Protecting and Supporting Young Consumers - Instruments of Food Policy in Romania. *Economics of Agriculture*, Year 61, No. 2 (269-552), Belgrade. Available from: <http://ageconsearch.tind.io/bitstream/175282/2/1%20EP%202%202014.pdf>.



Did you know...

Primarily because:



>50%³
skip breakfast



lack of time



work obligations



36%
weight
management



23%
no appetite

⁵ legislatie.just.ro, STRATEGIA NAȚIONALĂ din 18 noiembrie 2014 de sănătate 2014-2020. Available from: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/173679>.

⁶ Marinescu, E. România liberă. (30 March 2017). Noutăți în programele naționale de sănătate pentru anii 2017-2018. Available from: <http://www.romanalibera.ro/societate/sanatare/noutati-in-programele-nationale-de-sanatare-pentru-anii-2017-2018-445100>.

⁷ ec.europa.eu. School Milk Scheme - Romania. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/euprojects/school-milk-scheme-romania_en.

⁸ Government of Romania, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Member State: Romania. Subject: Strategy Regarding the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme for the School Year 2015/2016. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/sfs/documents/strategies-2015-2016/ro-2015-2016_en.pdf.

Slovenia

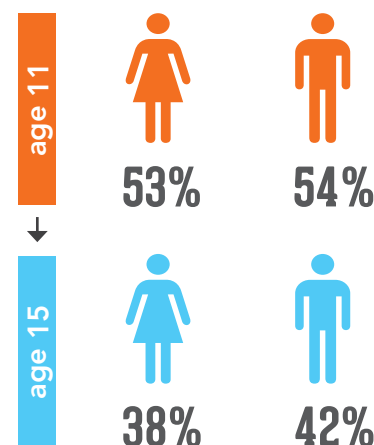
Key Findings

According to the 2016 WHO HBSC study, Slovenia has some of the lowest levels of adolescent breakfast consumption among all countries surveyed. 53% of 11-year-old girls and 54% of 11-year-old boys consume breakfast every weekday—the lowest figures of all 42 countries represented in the study. Only 38% of girls and 42% of boys aged 15 have breakfast every weekday. These are only 2 percentage points higher than the country with the lowest consumption statistics in this age group (Romania). Slovenia is well below the HBSC average consumption levels for boys and girls combined, which is 72% for 11-year-olds and 57% for 15-year-olds.¹

Slovenia has established a national health monitoring and surveillance system through the Countrywide Integrated Noncommunicable Diseases Intervention (CINDI) health monitor under the leadership of the National Institute of Public Health, which collects data every 4 years. The last survey took place in 2016 but the study results were not yet available at the time of publication of this report. According to the last published CINDI study analysis, there was an increased incidence of daily breakfast consumption from 2008 (50% of those surveyed) to 2012 (54%).²

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

The Ministry of Health's website states that national health research conducted in 2004, 2008 and 2012 has shown that only 30% of the population in the Republic of Slovenia eat healthily or mostly healthily. It is in this context that the Ministry recommends the consumption of five meals a day: breakfast, lunch, dinner and two minor meals, with breakfast providing the energy necessary to start the day.³ The National Institute of Public Health states in its latest CINDI study analysis that "breakfast is the most important meal of the daily diet, supplying the body in the morning with the energy and nutrients the body needs... Regular consumption of meals, especially breakfast, can lower the risk of developing obesity, through energy balance and metabolic mechanisms."³

The government's National Programme on Nutrition and Health Enhancing Physical Activity 2015-2025 is the result of joint work carried out by several ministries and represents the continuation and improvement of its

first Food and Nutrition Action Plan 2005-2010, which already contained measures and activities directed at improving eating habits and the health of the population, encouraging regular, healthy meals, as well as breakfast.⁴ Aiming to improve eating habits and opportunities for physical activity in order to halt the rise of chronic diseases and obesity, the National Programme 2015-2025 recognises the important role breakfast plays in giving people energy to start the day, and states that although more people in Slovenia are now in the habit of consuming a healthy breakfast, the statistics are still too low: 25% of men and 20% of women omit breakfast, and slightly less than half of young people eat breakfast every day. One of the National Programme's key strategic goals is thus to increase the prevalence of the population that eats breakfast every day by 10%. Specific action plans are being prepared for the implementation of measures outlined in the Programme, along with monitoring and evaluation.^{5, 6}

In 2011, the "Traditional Slovenian Breakfast" was implemented by the Slovenian Beekeepers' Association and supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Culture, the National Institute for Public Health, as well as other institutions and associations of the Republic of Slovenia. The purpose of the project, which organises locally sourced breakfasts at kindergartens and primary schools, is to educate and raise awareness among children of the importance of locally grown food and healthy eating habits at the breakfast table.⁷ Because of the success of the project, it has been repeated annually since.⁸

On the occasion of Slovenian Food Day in November 2015, Health Minister Milojka Kolar Celarc spoke about the importance of eating a healthy regular breakfast and combatting breakfast skipping in the context of the National Programme 2015-2025's goals to improve the nutritional health and

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HBSC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

2 Tomšič, S et al., eds. IZZIVI v izboljševanju vedenjskega sloga in zdravja - desetletje CINDI raziskav v Sloveniji (Challenges to improving health and lifestyle behaviour – a decade of CINDI research in Slovenia). Ljubljana, Nacionalni inštitut za javno zdravje (National Institute of Public Health), 2014. Available from: www.nijz.si/sites/www.nijz.si/files/publikacije-datoteke/izzivi_desetletje_cindi_14.pdf.

3 mz.gov.si, Prehrana. Available from: http://www.mz.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja_in_prioritete/javno_zdravje/varovanje_in_krepitev_zdravja_prehrana_gibanje_dusevno_zdravje_itd/prehrana/.

“ **Regular consumption of meals, especially breakfast, can lower the risk of developing obesity.** ”

4/4

- ✓ Ministry of Health or other ministry references the importance of breakfast
- ✓ Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being
- ✓ Information is clear and user friendly
- ✓ Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits

physical habits of the population. In addition to promoting the Traditional Slovenian Breakfast, the awareness day's activities educate children and young people about how breakfast is one of the most important meals of the day. The Minister recognised that, although research has shown that the eating habits of Slovenians are improving, more can be done.⁹

Analysis

Did you know...

30%³

of the population **eat healthily** or mostly healthily

The findings of surveys into Slovenian eating habits influenced the development and implementation of a nutritional policy in 2005 which encouraged regular and healthy meals, including breakfast. Despite this, Slovenia maintains some of the lowest adolescent breakfast consumption results of all countries surveyed in the WHO HBSC study. However, Slovenia's government has acknowledged this and taken active measures to improve these statistics, strengthening its policies relative to healthy eating with the implementation of the National Programme on Nutrition and Health

Enhancing Physical Activity 2015-2025. This Programme, which promotes and encourages a healthy breakfast and sets measurable targets for increasing national consumption figures, aims to ensure effective coordination and cooperation amongst ministries while encouraging synergies between stakeholders including civil society and NGOs, resulting in the optimisation of policies, financial instruments and monitoring. The government's proactive stance is encouraging and might have a positive influence on breakfast consumption and overall health statistics in the future.

4 Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Health. (2005). Food and Nutrition Action Plan for Slovenia 2005 - 2010. Summary available from: http://www.mz.gov.si/fileadmin/mz.gov.si/pageuploads/javno_zdravje_09/Nacionalni_program_prehranske_politike_ang.pdf.

5 mz.gov.si, Nacionalni program o prehrani in telesni dejavnosti za zdravje (2015 - 2025). Available from: http://www.mz.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja_in_prioritete/javno_zdravje/resolucija/.

6 Dober tek Slovenij - National Programme on Nutrition and Health Enhancing Physical Activity 2015-2025. Available from: http://www.mz.gov.si/fileadmin/mz.gov.si/pageuploads/javno_zdravje_2015/resolucija_preh_gib/DTS_brosura_zgibanka_slo_in_angl/brosura_DTS_angl_A4_za_print.pdf.

7 tradicionalni-zajtrk.si, O nas. Available from: http://tradicionalni-zajtrk.si/o_nas/.

8 Government of the Republic of Slovenia, Traditional Slovenian Breakfast – promoting healthy and locally produced food. (November 2016.) Available from: http://www.vlada.si/en/media_room/newsletter/slovenia_weekly/news/article/traditional_slovenian_breakfast_promoting_healthy_and_locally_produced_food_58973/.

9 mz.gov.si, Ministrica obeležila Dan slovenske hrane. (2015). Available from: http://www.mz.gov.si/si/medijsko_sredisce/novica/article/6707102/2b50bf7b609c9993fa74ff8f6144f894/.

Spain

Key Findings

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



The WHO HBSC study findings show that 86% of 11-year-old girls and 88% of 11-year-old boys in Spain consume breakfast regularly on weekdays. Even though these percentages drop as children get older, as is the case for other countries—63% of girls and 75% of boys aged 15 have breakfast every weekday—Spain's results are well above the HBSC average, placing Spain close to the top of the 42 country list.¹

The "Food and Assessment of the Nutritional Status of Spanish Adolescents" (*Alimentación y Valoración del Estado Nutricional en Adolescentes*), or AVENA, study conducted from 2000 to 2002 among a sample of 1,282 adolescents aged 13 to 18, showed that the number of Spanish breakfast skippers had increased during the last 30 years, especially among female and older adolescents. The main reasons for skipping breakfast were found to be lack of time, concerns about excess

body weight and not being hungry in the morning.²

The Irish Food Board (*Bord Bia*) "PERIscope 2015 Spanish Consumers & Their Food" study—which was conducted among a representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18 and above in Spain—revealed that 59% of Spanish adults admit to rarely having time to eat a "proper" breakfast. The study also found that although Spanish families are more likely to sit down to have breakfast together more often than they did in 2010, the majority tend to do so at weekends rather than weekdays.³

According to research conducted in 2009 by the Spanish Ministry of Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs, 72% of Spanish people (of 1,000 surveyed) claimed to always consume breakfast at home.⁴

Data from the National Health Survey of Spain 2011-2012, carried out by the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality in collaboration with the National Institute of Statistics, which collected information from 26,502 adults and children,⁵ indicate that 96.3% of adults⁶ and 98.24% of children⁷ under 18 have breakfast every day.

Every two years, the Spanish Agency for Consumer Affairs, Food Safety and Nutrition (AECOSAN) (an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality) and the Observatory for Nutrition and the Study of Obesity (a collegiate body, meeting platform and information system on the evolution of obesity in Spain) in the framework of the NAOS

Strategy (acronym for Strategy for Nutrition, Physical Activity and the Prevention of Obesity), carry out the ALADINO Study (Spanish acronym for Nutrition, Physical Activity, Child Development and Obesity Study). The ALADINO study is part of the WHO-Europe Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI),⁸ and the study's goal, in line with the policies of international health organisations (the World Health Organization, the European Union, etc.), is to reverse the trend in obesity prevalence through the promotion of healthy diet and physical exercise.

The most recent 2015 ALADINO study interviewed families on the eating habits of more than 6,500 children between the ages of 6 and 9. According to the results, 93% of families indicated that schoolchildren have breakfast every day (similar percentages to those observed in the 2011 and 2013 ALADINO studies), although the study analysis found that the percentage of schoolchildren who eat breakfast daily is lower among the obese.⁹

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

2 Nirehim L A, et al. (2005). How to measure dietary intake and food habits in adolescence: the European perspective. International Journal of Obesity 29: 66–77.

3 Bord Bia, Irish Food Board. (2015). PERIscope. Spanish Consumers & Their Food - Full Report.

Available from: <http://www.bordbia.ie/industry/manufacturers/insight/publications/bbreports/PERIscope6/PERIscope2015FinalReports/Periscope2015-SpainFull%20eport.pdf>.

4 Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Medio Rural y Marino. ¿Qué desayunan los españoles?.

Available from: http://www.mapama.gob.es/es/alimentacion/temas/consumo-y-comercializacion-y-distribucion-alimentaria/desayuno_espanoles_tcm7-7939.pdf.

Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

For many years the Health Ministry of Spain has been actively promoting the importance of breakfast among children and adults, emphasising the positive role it plays in weight management, the prevention of chronic diseases and higher life expectancy.

In 2005, the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality through AECOSAN launched the afore-mentioned NAOS Strategy, developing evidence-based actions and interventions in all areas of society (family, education, companies, the healthcare system, the workplace, communities) to promote and facilitate options for a varied, balanced diet and participation in physical exercise and to provide the best information to help consumers make better choices that enable them to lead healthier, more active lifestyles.¹⁰ The Observatory for Nutrition and the Study of Obesity was created in 2013 within the framework of the NAOS Strategy as an information system to keep track of the nutritional situation and the evolution of obesity of the Spanish population, including monitoring the breakfast consumption habits among the Spanish population, and as a meeting platform for all interested stakeholders.¹¹

The importance of a healthy and daily breakfast is a recurrent message in government actions to inform the public about the importance of a healthy lifestyle and dietary habits, and is included in various campaigns, publications, informational tools and educational materials, all made available online via the *Educa* NAOS (“NAOS Educate”) portal.¹²

Breakfast-encouraging campaigns supported by the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, through AECOSAN, include, to name a few: a 2006 and 2007 initiative to raise awareness of growing childhood obesity rates in Spain, clearly linking breakfast consumption to obesity prevention with its slogan, “Wake up! Have breakfast!” (*Despierta! Desayuna!*); Activilandia, a virtual theme park and classroom tool dedicated to the promotion of food, healthy habits and leisure; the HAVISA Plan, a television communication campaign promoting a balanced diet and regular physical activity; the website *Movimiento Actívale* targeting adolescents with, e.g., videos starring Olympic medallists and social network influencers; and National Nutrition Day, an annual initiative organised by the Spanish Federation of Societies of Nutrition, Food and Dietetics (FESNAD), in collaboration with AECOSAN and with the support of the pharmaceutical and food industry.¹³

The Spanish Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Food and Environment also actively encourages the consumption of a healthy breakfast by promoting

healthy values of the Mediterranean diet through initiatives such as the “Spanish Breakfast” (*Desayuno Español*), which endorses traditional Spanish foods such as coffee, bread, tomatoes and olive oil. In 2013 the Ministry launched an annual campaign promoting healthy Mediterranean eating habits and physical activity in Spanish schools, reaching tens of thousands of schoolchildren. However, the campaign does not specifically emphasise the health benefits of breakfast.¹⁵ Nevertheless, in 2014, the Healthy Eating Foundation (*La Fundación Alimentación Saludable*) – supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Food and Environment – released the “Easy Guide for a Healthy Breakfast and Afternoon Snack” (*Guía Fácil Para un Desayuno y una Merienda Saludable*) with clear messages on the importance of a healthy breakfast for children. The guide suggests that a balanced breakfast includes dairy, bread or cereal, a piece of fruit or fresh fruit juice, and a moderate amount of oil, jam, ham, etc. Additionally, it specifically states that children who have breakfast perform better at school and are less likely to be obese.¹⁶

“ Children who have breakfast perform better at school and are less likely to be obese. ”

5 Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad, Encuesta Nacional de Salud de España 2011/12.

Available from: <https://www.msssi.gob.es/estadEstudios/estadisticas/encuestaNacional/encuesta2011.htm>.

6 Evaluación y seguimiento de la Estrategia NAOS: conjunto mínimo de indicadores, Porcentaje de adultos que desayunan diariamente.

Available from: http://www.aecosan.msssi.gob.es/AECOSAN/docs/documentos/nutricion/observatorio/10_Porcentaje_de_adultos_desayunan_diariamente.pdf.

7 Evaluación y seguimiento de la Estrategia NAOS: conjunto mínimo de indicadores, Porcentaje de menores que desayunan diariamente.

Available from: http://www.aecosan.msssi.gob.es/AECOSAN/docs/documentos/nutricion/observatorio/11_Porcentaje_menores_que_desayunan_diariamente.pdf.

8 www.euro.who.int, WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI).

Available from: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/nutrition/activities/monitoring-and-surveillance/who-european-childhood-obesity-surveillance-initiative-cosi>.

“ For many years the Health Ministry of Spain has been actively promoting the importance of breakfast among children and adults, emphasising the positive role it plays in weight management, the prevention of chronic diseases and higher life expectancy. ”

Analysis

Regular breakfast consumption among the Spanish population, particularly for adolescents, appears to be above average compared to other European countries. In an attempt to stabilise the rapidly growing rates of obesity in Spain, in the last decade the Spanish government has invested in the promotion of healthy lifestyles and dietary practices. Breakfast has been at the forefront of many of these initiatives and activities, which include user friendly tools for use in the classroom and at home, websites, television

campaigns, an awareness day, etc. In parallel, the National Health Survey, the biannual Nutrition, Physical Activity, Child Development and Obesity Study and the Observatory for Nutrition and the Study of Obesity regularly monitor the health of the nation, including the population's breakfast consumption habits. These, in turn, help the government measure the success of its initiatives, as well as identify whether they have a positive effect on reducing obesity and changing food and lifestyle behaviours for the better.

Did you know...

Main reasons adolescents skip breakfast:²



lack of time



excess body weight concerns



not hungry in the morning



59%³ of adults say they rarely have time to eat a “proper” breakfast



93%⁹ of children ages 6-9 have breakfast every day

9 Estudio ALADINO 2015: Estudio de Vigilancia del Crecimiento, Alimentación, Actividad Física, Desarrollo Infantil y Obesidad en España 2015. Agencia Española de Consumo, Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutrición. Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad. Madrid, 2016.

Available from: http://www.aecosan.msssi.gob.es/AECOSAN/docs/documentos/nutricion/observatorio/Estudio_ALADINO_2015.pdf.

10 Agencia española de Consumo, Seguridad alimentaria y Nutrición, NAOS Strategy.

Available from: http://www.aecosan.msssi.gob.es/AECOSAN/web/nutricion/seccion/estrategia_naos.htm.

11 Agencia española de Consumo, Seguridad alimentaria y Nutrición, Observatorio de la Nutrición y de Estudio de la Obesidad, Qué es.

Available from: http://www.aecosan.msssi.gob.es/AECOSAN/web/nutricion/subseccion/que_es_observatorio.htm.

12 Agencia española de Consumo, Seguridad alimentaria y Nutrición, Educa NAOS. Available from: <http://www.aecosan.msssi.gob.es/AECOSAN/web/nutricion/seccion/educaNAOS.htm>.



4/4

- ✓ Ministry of Health or other ministry references the importance of breakfast
- ✓ Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being
- ✓ Information is clear and user friendly
- ✓ Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits

13 Agencia española de Consumo, Seguridad alimentaria y Nutrición, Campañas de Nutrición y Actividad Física. Available from: http://www.aecosan.msssi.gob.es/AECOSAN/web/nutricion/campanyas/listado/aecosan_listado_campanyas_nutricion.htm.

14 Ministerio de Agricultura y Pesca, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente. El MARM apoya la iniciativa "Desayuno Español" para difundir los valores saludables de la Dieta Mediterránea. Available from: <http://www.mapama.gob.es/es/prensa/noticias/el-marm-apoya-la-iniciativa-%E2%80%9CDesayuno-espa%C3%B1ol%E2%80%9D-para-difundir-los-valores-saludables-de-la-dietamediterr%C3%A1nea/tcm7-174898-16>.

15 Ministerio de Agricultura y Pesca, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente. Dieta Mediterránea. Available from: http://www.alimentacion.es/es/campanas/semana_de_la_dieta_mediterranea/.

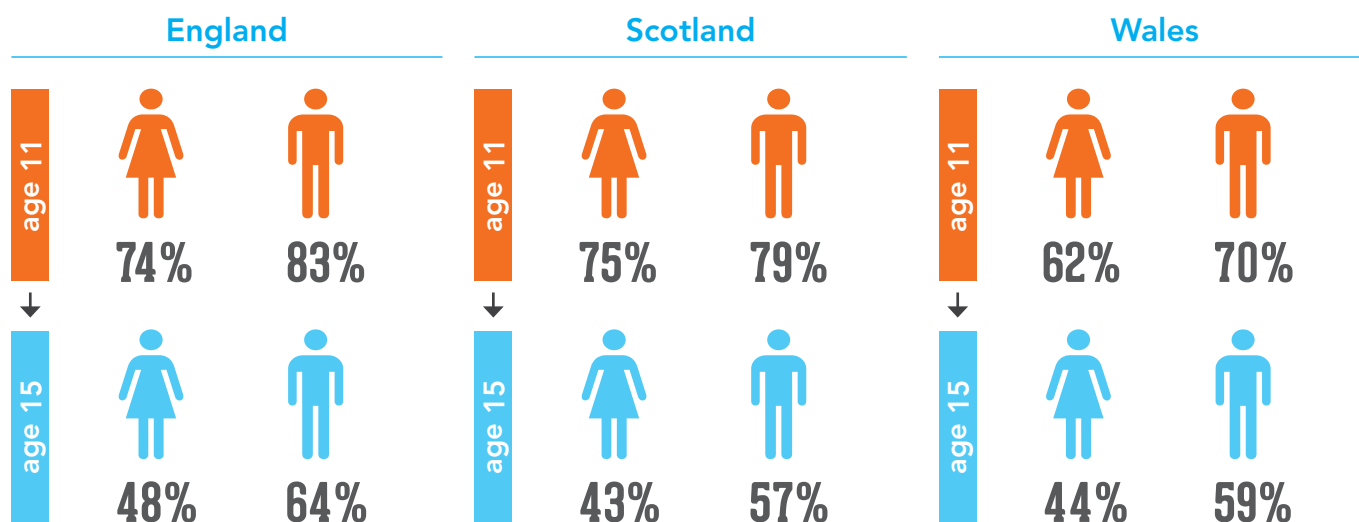
16 Fundación Alimentación Saludable. (2014). Guía fácil para un desayuno y una merienda saludable. Available from: <http://www.alimentacionsaludable.es/publicaciones/publicacion.asp?id=65>.

United Kingdom

Key Findings

WHO HBSC Study

% who eat breakfast every weekday



According to the 2016 WHO HBSC study, in England, 74% of 11-year-old girls and 83% of 11-year-old boys consume breakfast every weekday. In Scotland and Wales however, these percentages are lower. For 11-year-olds, 75% of Scottish girls and 79% of Scottish boys have breakfast on weekdays, whereas 62% of Welsh girls and 70% of Welsh boys do. Wales falls under the HBSC average (i.e. 72%) for this category. By the age of 15, these figures decrease significantly for all three countries: 48% and 64% of English girls and boys (respectively) eat breakfast every weekday, 44% and 59% of Welsh girls and boys do, and 43% and 57% of Scottish girls and boys do. The HBSC average for 15-year-olds is 52% for girls and 62% for boys. The corresponding WHO HBSC data for Northern Ireland is not available.¹

A study of 4,326 English schoolchildren aged 10-16 published in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in 2010 demonstrated that while 68% of English children always have breakfast before going to school, almost a third (32%)

regularly go to school without having had breakfast and 7% never have breakfast on school days. Moreover, the study showed that girls were more likely to skip breakfast than boys, with 38.6% of girls and 26.6% of boys skipping breakfast either occasionally or every day. Moreover, those not consuming breakfast were more likely to be inactive, unfit and obese.²

An article featured in *Nutrition Bulletin* in 2012 highlighted findings from a study entitled "Breakfast consumption in UK schoolchildren and provision of school breakfast clubs" which surveyed 3,311 children aged 5-15 across 65 schools on their breakfast consumption habits. The results indicated that one in seven UK schoolchildren skips breakfast (14%). The primary reasons cited for skipping breakfast were that they did not have enough time in the morning (33%) and that they never had breakfast (33%). Other reasons were that they did not want anything (27%) and did not enjoy eating in the morning (26%). According to the study, the difference between the

genders becomes more pronounced with age: 6% of 7 to 10-year-olds skip breakfast compared to 15% of 11 to 15-year-old boys and 26% of 11 to 15-year-old girls. A third of children who skip breakfast do not eat or drink anything until lunch time, and girls at secondary school represent the highest at-risk group for skipping breakfast. Overall, the findings suggest that breakfast skipping remains a concern for UK schoolchildren, particularly in adolescents.³ This was further supported by the results of a 2011 survey of nearly 11,000 UK parents, which found that 15% of secondary school pupils go to school without breakfast, although this figure dropped to 8.5% according to the same survey a year later.^{4,5}

The 2013 "A Lost Education: The reality of hunger in the classroom" report, based on an online survey among 762 teachers in England and Wales, found that one in seven children goes to school without breakfast, and this number is increasing. The effect, the report concludes, is a significant loss

1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HBSC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

2 Sandercock GRH, Voss C, Dye L. (2010). Associations between habitual school day breakfast consumption, body mass index, physical activity and cardiorespiratory fitness in English schoolchildren. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 64: 1086-1092.

3 Hoyland A, McWilliams KA, Duff RJ and Walton JL. (2012). Breakfast consumption in UK schoolchildren and provision of school breakfast clubs. *Nutrition Bulletin* 37 3: 232-240. Available from: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-3010.2012.01973.x/pdf>.

“A third of the teachers surveyed claim that they see at least one child arrive at school hungry every day.”

of learning. The report's findings show that if a child arrives at school hungry, they “lose” one hour of learning time a day, which means that if a child arrives at school hungry once a week he or she would lose 8.4 weeks of learning time over the course of his or her primary school life. A third of the teachers surveyed claim that they see at least one child arrive at school hungry every day.⁶

A study published in *Nutrition Bulletin* in 2011 evaluated consumption data taken from the “National Diet and Nutrition Survey” of 1,724 UK adults aged 19-64. The study found that approximately one in five adults consumed no solid food between 6 and 10am.⁷ According to the Irish Food Board (*Bord Bia*) “PERIscope 2015 Irish & British Consumers & Their Food”—a biennial study whereby research was conducted among a representative sample of 1,009 British adults aged 16 and above—49% of those surveyed said they rarely have time to eat a proper breakfast. *Bord Bia* also reported that those most likely to sit down together for breakfast are those

without children at home, those aged 65 and older, and the retired.⁸


In another 2015 study conducted among around 2,000 British people, two out of every five Brits admit to regularly skipping breakfast. This is twice as many as three years prior when the same survey found that only one in five Brits claimed to not make time for breakfast. However, the 2015 study shows significant differences in numbers between regions: only half of those surveyed in the north-east of England and Northern Ireland claimed to have breakfast every day; while nearly 70% in the east of England and Scotland did so. The study also found that cereal, porridge and toast remain the most popular breakfasts in the UK.⁹

The 2015 “BBC Good Food Nation” survey, which was administered among 5,046 adults aged 16+, showed that 31% of those surveyed skipped breakfast. This makes breakfast the most skipped meal of the day, as only 19% and 14% of people surveyed said they skipped lunch and dinner respectively.¹⁰


Did you know...



1 in 7³
schoolchildren
(5-15 years) skips
breakfast

6%  **6%**
7-10 years
skip breakfast



15%  **26%**
11-15 years
skip breakfast

31%¹⁰
of adults
skip breakfast



49%⁸
of adults rarely have
time to eat a proper
breakfast

4 ParentPay Limited. (2011). The LACA/ParentPay Market Research Report on School Meals and Daily Life Issues 2011. Available from: <http://www.laca.co.uk/sites/default/files/The%20LACA-ParentPay%20Market%20Research%20Report%202011.pdf>.

5 ParentPay Limited. (2012). The LACA/ParentPay Market Research Report on School Meals and Daily Life Issues 2012. Available from: http://www.laca.co.uk/sites/default/files/LACA_ParentPay_Research_2012.pdf.

6 Kellogg's. (2013). A Lost Education: The reality of hunger in the classroom. Available from: <http://pressoffice.kelloggs.co.uk/index.php?s=20295&item=122412>.

7 Gibson S and Gunn P. (2011). What's for breakfast? Nutritional implications of breakfast habits: insights from the NDNS dietary records. *Nutrition Bulletin* 36 1: 78-86. Available from: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-3010.2010.01873.x/abstract>.

“ Breakfast has long been regarded as one of the most important meals of the day, with a healthy breakfast being linked to better behaviour, better concentration, and better all-round health.”

Huw Lewis, Welsh Education Minister

Government Policies, Initiatives and Campaigns

The UK government is clearly active in the promotion of breakfast. The importance and benefits of breakfast are highlighted by the Department of Health's "NHS Choices" website which lists eating breakfast among its top eight tips for healthy eating.¹¹ Other notable campaigns falling under the NHS Choices umbrella include the "5 A Day" campaign promoting the daily consumption of five servings of fruits and/or vegetables (including for breakfast) and the "Eatwell Guide", the UK's version of a food pyramid with recommended servings of each of the main food groups. The mention of breakfast features intermittently among these initiatives.^{12, 13}

Similar advice is listed on the website of the England and Wales "Change4Life" campaign, one of the UK's biggest health initiatives run by the Department of Health, with "Breakfast4Life" a key subsection promoting the benefits of breakfast and hosting a wealth of resources such as good breakfast guides, activity sheets and other information.¹⁴ The principle aim of the Change4Life campaign is to curb rising levels of obesity in England.¹⁵ According to a policy paper published in 2015 on the UK Department of Health website, 61.9% of adults in England are overweight or obese, as are 28% of children between the ages of 2 and 15.¹⁶ Change4Life intends to reduce this trend by the year 2020 through the promotion of overall healthier lifestyles, including balanced diets and increased physical activity. The campaign is monitored by the Department of Health in order to evaluate which initiatives

have had the most impact in reaching this goal.¹⁷

The School Food Plan, published by the Department for Education in July 2013, sets out 17 actions "to transform what children eat in schools and how they learn about food", including allocating government funds to help schools in the poorest areas establish breakfast clubs.¹⁸ Breakfast clubs are very common in the United Kingdom. Although there is no standard model, the term "breakfast club" is used to describe any provision for children to eat a healthy breakfast in a safe environment before their first class. In 2011, it was estimated there were as many as 17,000 breakfast clubs in the UK, supported in many cases by local governmental authorities, and this number is likely to have increased.^{19, 20}

Some of the responsibility for health policy has been taken on by the different national governments in the UK. For example, in Wales, the "Welsh School Standards & Organisation Act" of 2013 states that local authorities must provide free breakfast to all pupils in primary schools that have requested them.²¹ In 2004, the Welsh government launched the "Free Breakfast" scheme aiming to provide free breakfast for primary schoolchildren. The scheme is supported via a network of school breakfast clubs which served around 10 million free and healthy breakfasts from 2009 to 2014. To mark the occasion of the 10 year anniversary of the scheme, Welsh Education Minister Huw Lewis said, "Breakfast has long been regarded as one of the most

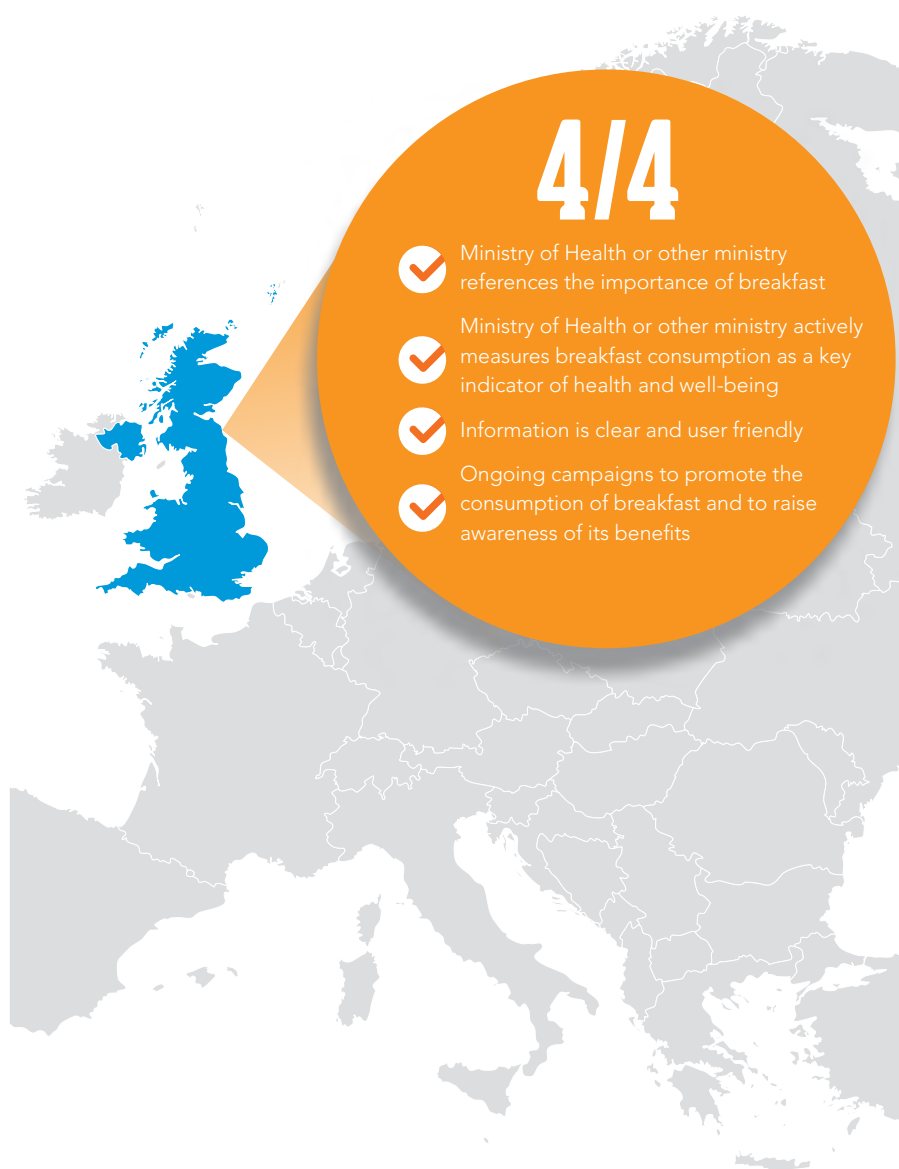
important meals of the day, with a healthy breakfast being linked to better behaviour, better concentration, and better all-round health." At the time, the scheme was operating in 82.6% of eligible Welsh primary schools, enabling tens of thousands of children, regardless of their background, to have the best possible start to the day.²²

Public Health England, an executive agency of the UK Department of Health, produces regular reports, including a summary of recent literature reviews on breakfast and cognition providing convincing evidence that consuming breakfast has positive impacts on short term cognition and memory.²³ The government also supports relevant civil society initiatives. For example, "Magic Breakfast", a UK charity that provides breakfast to more than 22,000 children a day, received a "Prime Minister's Big Society Award" for its efforts in this area.^{24, 25}

Breakfast skipping is a well-recognised issue in the UK, receiving regular media attention. The "Shake Up Your Wake Up" campaign and its annual "Breakfast Week"—run by the cereals and oilseeds division of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB)—aim to raise awareness of the benefits of eating a healthy breakfast and encourage people to think about the origins of their breakfast foods. During Breakfast Week 2016 alone, hundreds of breakfast-related events were held across the UK and more than 1,000 media articles relating to Breakfast Week were published.²⁶

Analysis

Overall, much attention is given to breakfast in the United Kingdom, which is reassuring considering the varying degrees of breakfast consumption and breakfast skipping. Ministries, health authorities and NGOs collectively recognise the importance of breakfast and its role in addressing public health issues. A number of public-private partnerships have been put in place across the UK to improve student access to breakfast, through a variety of different initiatives and campaigns that issue clear and user-friendly information on the benefits of a healthy breakfast. The effects of these campaigns are actively monitored and assessed by the government. Furthermore, there is consistent media coverage that is promoted by the government to raise awareness of the role of breakfast in the prevention and management of obesity and related diseases. Indeed, according to the UK government, breakfast consumption is considered a key health indicator and is thus prominently featured as part of its health and nutrition initiatives.



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- 22 wired-gov.net, Ten years of free breakfasts set Welsh learners off on the right start. Available from: <https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/news.nsf/articles/Ten+years+of+free+breakfasts+set+Welsh+learners+off+on+the+right+start+01122014090509?open>.
- 23 Public Health England. (2013). Breakfast and Cognition: Review of the literature. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/256398/Breakfast_and_cognition_review_FINAL_publication_formatted.pdf.
- 24 magicbreakfast.com, Research links eating to educational attainment. Available from: <https://www.magicbreakfast.com/news/research-links-eating-breakfast-to-educational-attainment>.
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Part 3

Analysis and Recommendations

Analysis and Conclusions

Promotion of breakfast as important, beneficial and as a key health indicator in European countries

The provisions for breakfast promotion across Europe vary immensely from country to country. Countries were awarded points based on whether the ministry of health or other ministry referenced the importance of breakfast and whether the ministry measures breakfast consumption as a key health indicator (one point for each). Two further points were awarded if ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits were evident in the country and if the information provided about breakfast was clear and user-friendly.

Figure 1 shows the sixteen European countries arranged on the basis of the scores that each was awarded, while Figure 2 shows which specific criteria each country met.

Thirteen of the countries assessed in this report had references made to the importance of breakfast in public health material produced by the relevant government agency or ministry. The thirteen countries that scored well on the quality of the information—judged to be clear and informative—were the same as those whose ministries referenced breakfast.

The Mediterranean countries, with the exception of Greece, scored highly and levels of breakfast consumption tended to be higher than other countries for children and adolescents, based on available data from the latest WHO HBSC study which is summarised in Figures 3 and 4. The programmes in these countries were aimed at children and motivated by

childhood obesity. Portugal and Spain both had a number of schemes targeting children; perhaps these efforts have resulted in the maintenance of high percentages of breakfast consumption and low levels of breakfast skipping in contrast to the prevalence seen in the other European states, with the exception of the Netherlands whose campaigns have also targeted teenagers and negated the increase in breakfast skipping in this age group.

In contrast, the Eastern European countries included in the review generally scored poorly and their lack of promotion of breakfast paralleled poor diet quality, detrimental indicators of public health and higher levels of poverty than the other countries included.

The more affluent northern European countries varied in the extent to which they promoted breakfast or referenced it by their public health ministry. The Netherlands shared the highest score of four, along with Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and the UK. The Dutch health authorities provide comprehensive, extensive and specific campaigns. Interestingly, the Netherlands also has either the highest or second highest children and adolescent breakfast consumption figures and the lowest percentages of overweight and obesity among adolescents of the 28 EU Member States, coupled with high rates of physical activity. Although these other high scoring countries promoted breakfast on all criteria, the Dutch campaigns also appeared to utilise media coverage effectively and engage athletes and celebrities as well as politicians to endorse their campaigns. It may be that these innovative approaches appeal to young people and have helped to communicate the importance of breakfast in a manner to which teenagers are particularly receptive and this has prevented the more substantial rise in breakfast skipping seen in most of the other high scoring countries.

The UK scored well; it has good publicity about breakfast skipping and the extensive research to evaluate the effects of breakfast clubs in schools conducted in the UK has highlighted the importance of breakfast. The breakfast club initiatives and their positive evidence of effectiveness across a range of outcomes is specific to the UK and was not present in the same form in other European countries. It is therefore an intervention strategy from which member states with low breakfast consumption figures, particularly in younger children, might benefit.

Figure 1. Country Scores

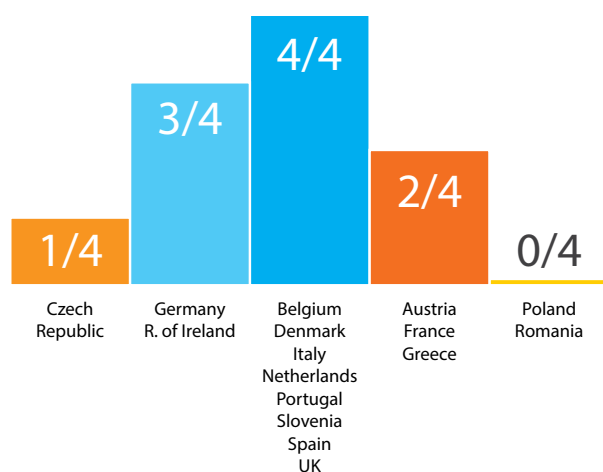











Figure 2. Country scores per criteria

Country	Total score	Ministry of Health or other ministry references the importance of breakfast	Ministry of Health or other ministry actively measures breakfast consumption as a key indicator of health and well-being	Information is clear and user friendly	Ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits
 Belgium	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
 Denmark	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
 Italy	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
 Netherlands	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
 Portugal	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
 Slovenia	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
 Spain	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
 UK	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
 Germany	3	✓		✓	✓
 R. of Ireland	3	✓	✓	✓	
 Austria	2	✓		✓	
 France	2	✓		✓	
 Greece	2	✓		✓	
 Czech Republic	1				✓
 Poland	0				
 Romania	0				
		13	9	13	10

Denmark also embraced breakfast and provided highly accessible material and evidence-based practices underpinned by academic and scientific-based research.

Interestingly, breakfast consumption statistics in the French Community of Belgium were closer to those in France than they were to the Flemish Community's. Perhaps cultural differences also interact with breakfast preferences even within one country. This could be something that future campaigns might consider.

Germany had both national and regional campaigns (at the federal state level). The focus of the national action plan is mainly on healthy eating. It may be that regional campaigns of the type promoted in Germany may be effective at local level but this data is not evaluated in such a way as to determine the most effective interventions. In addition, there may be regional differences in levels of breakfast consumption and breakfast food preferences, as in the case of Belgium and across the German federal states, which mean that initiatives at this

more focussed local level are likely to be more effective, particularly when groups such as teenagers are targeted in an appealing manner, as seen in the Dutch campaigns.

Austria, France and Greece all referenced the importance of breakfast, providing information that was clear and user-friendly, but none of these countries had ongoing programmes to promote breakfast consumption, nor did they actively measure breakfast consumption by means of surveys of the health of the population.

- 1 World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. (2013). Methodology and summary: Country profiles on nutrition, physical activity and obesity in the 28 European Union Member States of the WHO European Region. Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/243419/Summary-document-28-MS-country-profile.pdf?ua=1.
- 2 Brug J, van Stralen MM, te Velde SJ, Chinapaw MJM, De Bourdeaudhuij I, Lien N, et al. (2012). Differences in Weight Status and Energy-Balance Related Behaviors among Schoolchildren across Europe: The ENERGY-Project. PLoS ONE 7(4): e34742. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0034742>

Breakfast consumption in children and adolescents in each European country

The WHO HBSC study data presented in this report are limited but suggestive that the prevalence of breakfast varies considerably among children and adolescents in different European countries.

Figures 3 and 4 represent the HBSC study percentages of children aged 11 and 15 who consume breakfast

every weekday (showing only the data relating to the 16 countries evaluated in this report).¹

For reference, the HBSC average for 11-year-olds is 72%, or, when split by gender: 70% for girls and 75% for boys. The HBSC average for 15-year-olds is 57%, or, when split by gender: 52% for girls and 62% for boys.

The lowest percentages of breakfast consumption in children were seen in the eastern European countries, in particular Romania and Slovenia. The highest percentages were found in the Netherlands and Portugal where almost all younger children ate breakfast regularly.

At the younger age of 11 there is little to distinguish boys and girls in terms of breakfast consumption within each of the countries (or regions) in the table, although there are substantial differences between countries. In adolescence, although the same national patterns are evident, a noticeable difference between the genders in the prevalence of breakfast consumption is apparent, with 15-year-old girls much less likely to consume breakfast than boys of the same age. The previous HBSC study, published in 2012, indicated that girls had lower odds of habitually eating breakfast in 33 out of the 41 HBSC countries investigated.² In the 2016 study this gender difference is still apparent.

The EU-funded “Healthy Lifestyle in Europe by Nutrition in Adolescence” (HELENA) study showed that significantly fewer European adolescent boys agreed that they “often skip breakfast” compared to girls: 33% vs. 42% respectively.³ Another study similarly observed that female adolescents were more likely to skip breakfast than males: 67% vs. 33% respectively.⁴ Gender differences have also been reported in American 15-year-olds, with more females skipping breakfast than males: 23% vs. 14% respectively.⁵ Thus gender differences are commonly observed both within Europe and beyond. Interestingly, culture may also play a role since

Figure 3. 11-year-olds who eat breakfast every weekday

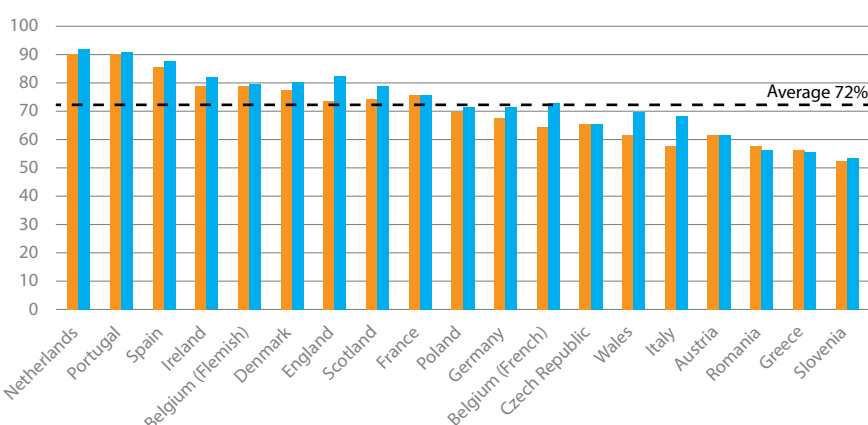
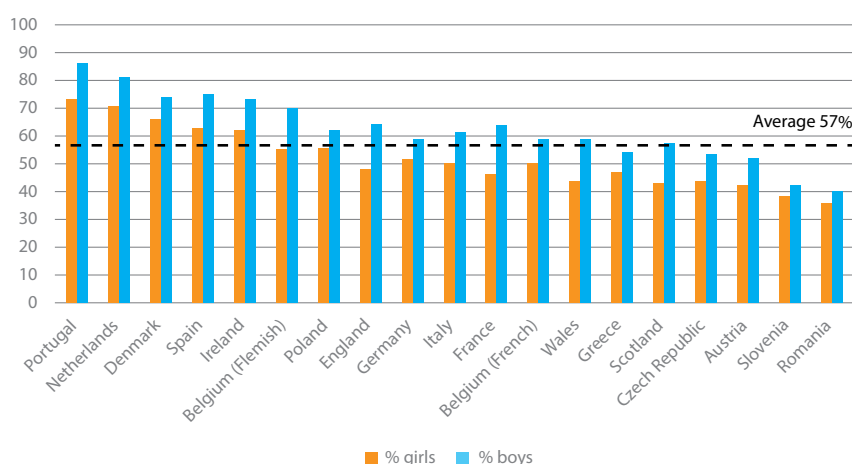


Figure 4. 15-year-olds who eat breakfast every weekday



breakfast consumption was lower in the French Community of Belgium than in the Flemish Community, and Belgium's French Community data resembled those observed in French adolescents.

Breakfast skipping is often used as a strategy to lose weight by female adolescents.⁶ British female adolescents who were dieting were found to be three times more likely to skip breakfast than non-dieting female adolescents.⁷ Interestingly, this gender difference did not occur in school children of primary school age, according to a survey among American children.⁸ In 2012, the prevalence of breakfast skipping in British primary school children (5-11 years) was equal across genders: 6% for males and females. However, in secondary school children (11-15 years), a considerably larger proportion of females (26%) than males (15%) skipped breakfast.⁹

The higher frequency of breakfast consumption reported in adults may reflect a cohort effect such that those adults who currently regularly eat breakfast are likely to have done so

as children since food habits formed in childhood are more likely to be maintained in adulthood.¹⁰ This has some important implications for the future breakfast consumption patterns of the children, adolescents and young people represented in the data summarised above. Breakfast consumption figures are much lower in these groups when compared to older adult data. Across almost all the countries included in this report, the pattern of breakfast consumption takes the form of a U-shaped curve, with high figures observed among children and the elderly, and the lowest figures among teenagers. Without intervention, these levels of breakfast consumption are likely to remain lower and potentially decline further when frequently cited reasons for missing breakfast, such as work pressure and lack of time, become salient, e.g. when these children and adolescents reach working age. Moreover, recent reviews have concluded that performance of attention, executive function and memory tasks were facilitated more reliably by breakfast consumption relative to fasting, with effects more

apparent in undernourished children¹¹ and that there is an association between breakfast consumption and academic outcomes.¹² This underlines the importance of early intervention focusing on encouraging the formation of good breakfast habits in childhood.



- 1 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HBSC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.
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- 11 Adolphus K, Lawton CL, Champ C and Dye L. (2016). The Effects of Breakfast and Breakfast Composition on Cognition in Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review. *Advances in Nutrition* 7 (3): 590S-612S. doi: 10.3945/an.115.010256.
- 12 Adolphus K, Lawton CL and Dye L. (2015). The Relationship between Habitual Breakfast Consumption Frequency and Academic Performance in British Adolescents. *Frontiers in Public Health* 3. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2015.00068.

Factors affecting breakfast consumption in children and adolescents

The evidence that socio-economic status (SES) is associated with breakfast eating is very consistent, such that school children from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to eat breakfast than school children from lower SES backgrounds. This relationship exists for a range of SES indicators, including parental education level^{1,2,3,4} parent occupation,⁵ material affluence,⁶ receipt of Free School Meals (FSM)⁷ and area-level deprivation indices.^{8,9} This was also evident in the data presented in this report. In particular, the impact of austerity on Greek policies, initiatives and campaigns can be seen clearly in the low score achieved and the failure to renew promising initiatives. Affluence also features as an explanation for some of the lower rates of consumption seen in eastern European countries which also have fewer campaigns and poorer health status. For these countries, breakfast promotion might be a simpler, inexpensive and relatively easy intervention to implement to address growing obesity and health related issues.

Affluence can determine family food choice and purchasing power, which allows the family to obtain

nutritious and tasty breakfast foods. It can reflect a more supportive home environment where food is more likely to be consumed as a social event. Affluence is also associated with family structure, which can influence breakfast consumption patterns, e.g. living in a two parent family was positively associated with breakfast eating in children and adolescents.¹⁰ Recent evidence has also shown that living in single parent families was associated with increased odds of irregular breakfast eating (≤ 3 weekdays per week) in Scottish adolescents, an effect which remained following adjustment for sex, ethnicity and age.¹¹ However, a significantly greater proportion of adolescents from single parent families were categorised as having low family affluence (proxy of SES), which was not adjusted for in the analyses, precluding conclusions on the independent effects of family structure on breakfast consumption. In contrast, the HELENA study of over 3000 European adolescents found that breakfast skipping was not associated with family structure when family affluence was controlled for.¹² However, another study demonstrated that having a parent at home in the morning before adolescents left for school did

not significantly influence breakfast consumption, which could be due to a resistance to, or decrease in, parental control over eating habits during adolescence.¹³

Although affluence is associated with breakfast consumption, cultural factors are also important. There is good evidence that breakfast consumption varies across ethnic groups. In British 11-13-year-olds, black Caribbean, black African and Indian adolescents were more likely to skip breakfast than white adolescents.¹⁴ Several US studies also show similar patterns. The 1999-2006 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) indicated that a significantly lower proportion of white children and adolescents (9-18 years) were breakfast skippers compared to black and other non-white/mixed ethnicity children and adolescents.¹⁵ There is a lack of consideration of ethnicity in relation to breakfast consumption patterns in other European countries, yet the ethnic diversity within Europe is becoming greater.

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Implications for policy and intervention

It is encouraging that the importance of breakfast is being acknowledged by policymakers, as evidenced by the majority of health (or other relevant) ministries referencing the importance of breakfast in their material. However, far fewer countries actively translate this acknowledgement of the potential health benefits of breakfast into initiatives or campaigns to increase consumption or even to define what constitutes a healthy breakfast within the realm of national tastes and local produce. Those that do, such as the Netherlands, appear to reap the benefit in terms of other health indicators such as obesity, although there may, as discussed above, be other factors in addition to breakfast that play a role in these effects. Countries which have recently invested in campaigns to increase consumption of healthy breakfasts, motivated by increasing childhood obesity rates, require long term research to evaluate the efficacy of their programmes; and countries where initiatives are currently absent may profit also from these evaluations.

Governments clearly need evidence of the cost-benefit relationship to justify and underpin decisions about initiatives to improve public health. This applies equally to campaigns

to promote breakfast as it does to simply recommending breakfast as part of a healthy diet. Especially in the current economic climate in Europe, health promotion and educational organisations supported by government need to demonstrate value for money in the short and the long term. It is sometimes difficult to translate the effect of increasing or decreasing a particular behaviour on health outcomes in the short term, and long term follow up studies that include health economic analysis are rare. A recent study calculated that a small change in diet, where 75% of those with constipation make no change in diet and 25% increase their intake of dietary fibre by 3g daily, could result in potential reduction in constipation-related costs for a country the size of Spain of over €24m per annum.¹ The cost benefit of improving health outcomes by increasing breakfast consumption is difficult to estimate, and the potential benefit to long-term educational outcomes and future employment prospects that are suggested by the association of habitual breakfast consumption and academic performance even more so.² However, this does not mean that initiatives to increase breakfast consumption do not

have economic, as well as social and psychological benefits.

It has been argued that health promotion initiatives tend to be more accessible to and more readily adopted by people of higher SES.³ Therefore, it is important that initiatives supported by government or other agencies to promote breakfast target those less likely to respond on their own volition. School breakfast programmes could be a sensible strategy to reach schoolchildren and to address inequalities in health. A review of the benefits of school breakfast clubs reported that breakfast clubs in the UK offer benefits to cognitive and academic performance and social development alongside nutritional gains, which may be more pronounced in breakfast clubs operating in deprived areas.⁴ However, research on school breakfast clubs comes primarily from the UK where provision is largely in primary schools. There is room for improvement regarding breakfast provision in secondary schools across the European countries reviewed. This could address the clear need identified in the current data – the large change in breakfast consumption between children and adolescents – and might reverse the trend for increased breakfast skipping



“ Consuming breakfast compared to skipping breakfast has positive impacts on cognition in the short term. ”

by helping to maintain this healthy habit of eating breakfast into adulthood.

A recent review for Public Health England concluded that although there was convincing evidence that consuming breakfast compared to skipping breakfast has positive impacts on cognition in the short term, the implications for specific learning and longer term attainment were unclear.⁵ Since this report there have been a number of systematic reviews, cross-sectional studies, and media reports, which have demonstrated an association between breakfast consumption and academic attainment.^{6, 7, 8}

A review found an association between breakfast consumption and performance on Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs) in American children aged 9-11 years, concluding that promoting breakfast might improve overall

academic attainment, however there was no evidence that improving breakfast consumption would reduce inequality in educational outcomes.⁹ No association was found between habitual breakfast and performance on the cognitive abilities test (CATs) (a reasoning test routinely used in UK schools) in adolescents aged 11-13 years,¹⁰ but subsequent research showed an association with habitual performance and GCSE (the examination taken at the end of secondary school in the UK) performance.¹¹ This study showed that school-day breakfast skipping was negatively associated with GCSE point scores after controlling for confounders including socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, age and body mass index (BMI). Moreover, adolescents from low to middle SES backgrounds who skipped breakfast had significantly lower odds of obtaining high math grades compared to frequent breakfast

consumers. Taken together, there is suggestive evidence that breakfast consumption may be associated with better academic outcomes at some stages of education, but it is unlikely that simply promoting breakfast will address major effects of socio-economic status and other factors which lead to inequality in educational outcomes.

Breakfast skipping has been associated with other health-compromising behaviours in children and adolescents, including physical inactivity and poorer cardio-respiratory fitness,¹² poorer micro- and macronutrient intake,^{13, 14} low fruit and vegetable intake¹⁵ and smoking.¹⁶ There is also evidence of clustering in certain healthy lifestyle behaviours, such that frequent physical activity, fruit and vegetable consumption and breakfast consumption cluster together in adolescents.¹⁷

It is therefore important that public health bodies recognise the negative impact of breakfast skipping on health and other outcomes and take action to reduce its occurrence in young people throughout Europe.

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EU Food & Nutrition Initiatives

The key role of health has been broadly recognised as an integral element in most major European Union strategic initiatives, and is a part of Europe 2020 – the EU's 10-year economic growth strategy. Due to soaring obesity rates and other health concerns across Europe, over the past decade the EU has taken a number of measures aimed at reversing these trends. The promotion of proper nutrition and healthy eating habits features as an important aspect of this overall goal.

Below are some of the main EU level initiatives and policies taken within that framework:

- **Green Paper: Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases (2005).**¹ The primary objective of this green paper is to provide a steer on future policy initiatives and lay the groundwork for potential EU level actions to be taken in this area.
- **EU platform for action on diet, physical activity and health (2005).**² This platform is a forum composed of civil society organisations and led by the European Commission. Its aim is to stimulate debate and serve as an example of coordinated action that will encourage national, regional and/or local initiatives across Europe.
- **White Paper: A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues (2007).**³ This policy document sets out the EU's long-term strategy to reduce ill health due to poor nutrition, overweight and obesity.
- **High Level Group (HLG) on Nutrition and Physical activity (2007).**⁴ Led by the Commission, this HLG seeks to develop European solutions to obesity-related health issues by helping national governments share policy ideas and best practice.
- **Horizon 2020 (2014-2020).**⁵ The EU's current Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020, supports research encouraging a healthy and sustainable diet and lifestyle, financing projects on topics such as "How to tackle childhood obesity epidemic?"^{6,7} It also supports the Joint Programming Initiative "Healthy diet for a healthy life" to coordinate European research on diet and lifestyles on health.⁸ Horizon 2020 has funded 14 related projects (€17 million) from 2014-2016, and the previous 7th Framework Programme for Research (2007-2013) contributed €200 million (94 projects) to obesity research.⁹
- **Third EU Health Programme (2014-2020).**¹⁰ This Programme is the EU's main instrument for funding health related projects across Europe, including those that promote healthy eating habits. As an example, the ACTIVE project is an animation produced for children between 5 and 8 to educate them on healthy eating habits, including the importance of breakfast.¹¹ The "Health Behaviour in School-aged Children" (HBSC) studies published in 2012 and 2016¹² by the World Health Organization, which collected and reviewed data on eating behavior and breakfast consumption (this information is cited in this report), have received funding from the European Union in the framework of its Health Programmes.
- **EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity (2014-2020).**¹³ This initiative represents the EU's long-term strategy aiming to halt the rise in the number of obese and overweight children by 2020 through eight different areas of action. While eating habits are described as an influential factor in childhood obesity and the Plan identifies the need to promote healthy family meals, the importance of breakfast consumption is not specifically mentioned in the 68-page policy document.
- **The European Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity (JANPA) (2015-2017).**¹⁴ The main objective of the Commission-supported JANPA (which is a direct contribution to the EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity 2014-2020) is to stop the rise of overweight and obesity in children and adolescents by 2020, focusing on specific outcomes that strongly contribute to the nutritional and physical activity policies dedicated to childhood. Through the sharing, identification and selection of best data and practices within the 26 countries involved (25 Member States and Norway), JANPA will be able to estimate and forecast the economic costs of overweight and obesity; to improve the implementation of integrated interventions to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for pregnant women and families with young children; to contribute to healthier school environments; to increase the use of nutritional information of foods by public health authorities, stakeholders and families.

1 Commission of the European Communities. (2005). Green paper: "Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases". Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/documents/nutrition_gp_en.pdf.
 2 ec.europa.eu, EU platform for action on diet, physical activity and health. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/health/nutrition_physical_activity/platform_en.
 3 Commission of the European Communities. (2007). White paper on A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/health/archive/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/documents/nutrition_wp_en.pdf.
 4 ec.europa.eu, High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical activity. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/health/nutrition_physical_activity/high_level_group/index_en.htm.
 5 ec.europa.eu, Horizon 2020. Available from: <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/>.

There are currently two separate EU-funded school distribution programmes under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that specifically target children in schools: the "School Milk Scheme" (SMS), set up in 1977, and the "School Fruit Scheme" (SFS) set up in 2009/2010, although these will be merged into a single EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme, effective as of the start of the 2017/2018 school year.

- **EU School Milk Scheme (SMS) (1977).**¹⁵ This scheme, launched in 1977 and revised in 2008, with the aim of encouraging good eating habits by increasing consumption of milk in children and young people and providing them with healthy dairy products, thus contributing to the fight against obesity among children. All EU Member States participate in the School Milk Scheme. The final figures for the 2013/14 school year (the most recent available) show that just over 19 million children in 27 Member States benefited from the scheme.
- **EU School Fruit and Vegetables Scheme (SFVS) (2009/2010).**¹⁶ Set up in the context of poor nutrition and increasing child obesity rates, and on the basis that good habits established in childhood continue in later life, this EU-wide voluntary scheme provides school children with fruit and vegetables, aiming thus to encourage good eating habits in young people. Besides providing fruit and vegetables, the scheme requires participating Member States to set up strategies including educational and awareness-raising initiatives, such as "5 a day" promoting the consumption of five portions (of 80 g) of fruit and vegetables every day. According to the latest figures from the 2015/2016 school year, 24 Member States participate in the voluntary programme and the scheme reached 11.7 million children in nearly 80,000 schools across the EU.¹⁷

Although there are differences in design and administration, the SMS and SFVS schemes basically aim at encouraging the consumption of fruit, vegetables and milk as these have proven benefits in terms of public health. The European Commission proposed in January 2014 that these two separate schemes be brought under a common framework to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.¹⁸ After political agreement on a single **EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme** at the end of 2015, and approval by the European Parliament (8 March 2016) and Council (11 April 2016), the two individual schemes will merge into one as from the start of the 2017/2018 school year in August 2017.

This common framework puts greater focus on educational measures to improve children's awareness of healthy eating habits, the range of farm produce available, as well as sustainability, environmental and food waste issues. According to the European Commission, the new legal framework aims "at durably increasing the share of these products in the diet of children, when their eating habits are being formed. It contributes to the Common Agricultural Policy objectives of ensuring the availability of both current and future supplies and to the public health objectives of shaping healthy eating habits."¹⁹ Participation in the scheme will be voluntary for Member States, and they will also have flexibility to choose the products they wish to distribute as long as they follow certain guidelines based on health and environmental considerations and are in line with the objective of healthy eating habits.

Conclusion

While the European Union has undertaken many initiatives that help address pan-European health issues, such as overweight and obesity, it has done little to promote breakfast consumption as a tool in addressing today's health challenges. Although nutrition education campaigns set up in the context of these initiatives might include information on breakfast consumption in practice, there are currently no EU level campaigns that expressly promote breakfast consumption – in fact, the term "breakfast" is not given a single mention in any of the above EU policy documents and strategies.

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- European Commission. (2014). EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity 2014-2020. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/health/nutrition_physical_activity/docs/childhoodobesity_actionplan_2014_2020_en.pdf.

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15 ec.europa.eu, European School Milk Scheme. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/milk/school-milk-scheme_en.

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18 European Commission. (2014). Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 as regards the aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk in the educational establishments. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/school-scheme/legislative-proposal/com-2014-32_en.pdf.

19 ec.europa.eu, EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/school-scheme_en.

Breakfast is Best Policy Recommendations

All European countries, as well as the European Union itself, promote healthy diets and lifestyles through policy instruments and communications. Over the past ten years, the role of health has been fully integrated into EU level initiatives and policies, as shown in the 2005 Green Paper on “Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases” and the 2007 White Paper on “A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues”.^{1, 2}

Along with this, the European Union created and fully supported a series of multi-stakeholder programmes such as the “EU platform for action on diet, physical activity and health” (2005) and the “High Level Group (HLG) on Nutrition and Physical activity” (2007), as well as the “EU Health Programme” (2014-2020), the “EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity” (2014-2020) and the “European Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity” (JANPA) (2015-2017). In addition, concrete actions such as the “EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme” aim to reach children directly in schools to promote improved and balanced diets.

Similarly, the EU and national governments are increasingly concerned about the health and economic implications associated with rising obesity rates and health-related diseases. This has resulted in some European member states actively investing in public-private partnerships to reverse these trends and focusing on implementing a variety of measures to inform citizens on improved nutrition and healthy eating habits.

“ Not enough has been done on an EU or national level to promote the health benefits of breakfast as part of a balanced lifestyle. ”

However, on the issue of breakfast more specifically, not enough has been done on an EU or national level to promote its key health benefits as part of a balanced and healthy lifestyle. We at Breakfast is Best believe that this must change. Clear guidance from European and national authorities can help encourage more children and adults alike to understand the importance of making time for breakfast.

A growing body of scientific research shows that breakfast-skipping is linked to increased absenteeism, lower performance rates, sedentary lifestyles, a slower metabolism and poor dietary choices. It is now known by many policymakers that breakfast consumption can not only help manage and reduce the risk of diabetes, but it can also play a fundamental role in lowering the chances of other non-communicable diseases such as obesity, high blood pressure and low nutritional intake. Furthermore, there is increasing consensus among the healthcare community that nutritional habits instilled in childhood will greatly affect overall health in adulthood.

Yet Europeans as a whole are not fully aware of the importance of breakfast.

This is why Breakfast is Best supports a three-prong strategy outlined in our “Call for Action”:

1. The long-term goal of ensuring that, by 2020, all EU countries include the importance of eating breakfast in their nutrition policies, and monitor breakfast consumption as a key health indicator.
2. Have “Eat breakfast everyday” added to standard nutrition advice, and include the importance of breakfast in school curricula and employee health initiatives.
3. Ensure that the WHO/Europe “Health 2020 strategy” and EU actions on health inequalities reflect the importance of eating breakfast for long-term health outcomes.

Concretely, on a European level, we would welcome a Green Paper from the European Commission stressing the importance of breakfast and other positive behaviours. This Green Paper could feed into more concrete policies down the line on either a European or national level.

We would also welcome a European Parliament resolution affirming the importance of breakfast in positive lifestyle behaviours. Individual Members of European Parliament have already affirmed their support for the Breakfast is Best campaign, and we believe it is vital that this support now be translated into a concrete affirmation from Europe’s parliamentarians of the need to encourage breakfast consumption. Lastly, through multi-stakeholder collaborations such as the Breakfast is Best campaign, we call for greater support through official endorsement and funding opportunities provided by EU and member state institutions on breakfast-focused campaigns.

1 Commission of the European Communities. (2005). Green paper: “Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases”. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/documents/nutrition_gp_en.pdf.
 2 Commission of the European Communities. (2007). White Paper on A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/health/archive/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/documents/nutrition_wp_en.pdf.



“Through these and other actions, and in working alongside other like-minded stakeholders and partners, the Breakfast is Best campaign calls on Europe’s policymakers—both at national and EU level, schools, businesses and civil society alike to do more to help improve breakfast consumption figures and reap the potential health benefits thereof, for today and generations to come. We hope that this report can contribute to achieving these aims.”



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