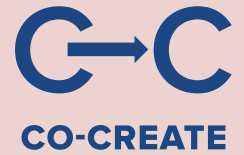


May 2023



Addressing childhood obesity across Europe:

a snapshot of adolescent-focused diet and physical activity policies from the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and the United Kingdom



Introduction

Over 338 million children¹ globally are affected by overweight or obesity², and according to data from WHO Europe (2020) one in five European 11 to 15-year-olds are living with overweight or obesity.³

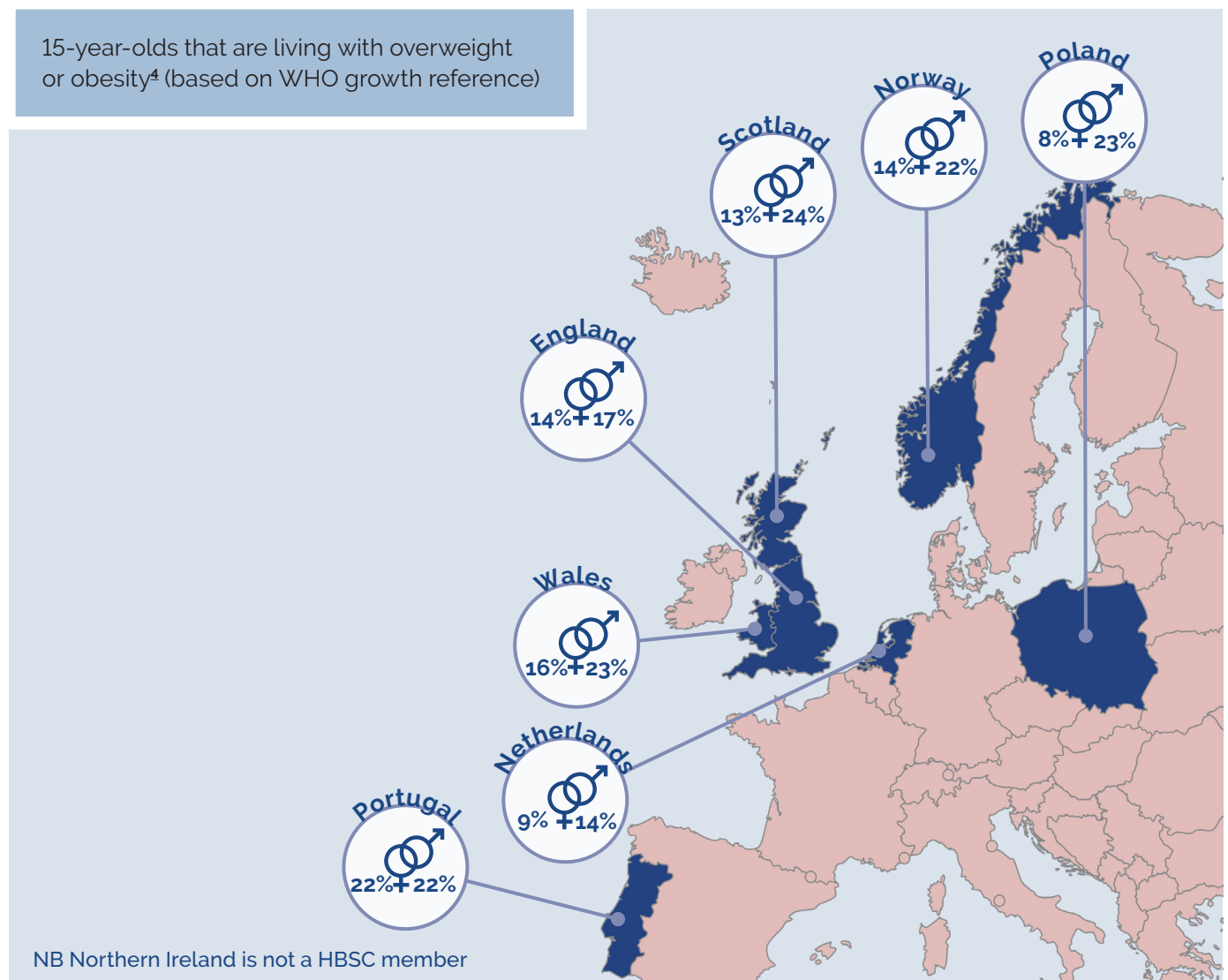
However, childhood obesity is preventable, and policies can be used to promote healthy diets and increase physical activity. The **CO-CREATE project** works to address childhood obesity through educating and empowering adolescents to advocate for policies which support making the healthiest choice the preferred one.

This policy brief was produced by World Cancer Research Fund International, as part of the European Research project **Confronting Obesity: Co-creating policy with youth** – or 'CO-CREATE' and reviews a snapshot of policies to show how five European countries – the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Poland,

and the UK – are addressing childhood obesity through promoting healthy diets and physical activity.

Six policy areas which are particularly relevant to young people and adolescents, have been assessed using two benchmarking tools – known as the **NOURISHING** and **MOVING** benchmarking tools – which review the key attributes and strengths of policies against a scoring criterion to generate an overall assessment of policy design. The benchmarking tools tell us if policies aimed at promoting healthy diets or increasing physical activity are well designed.

As shown through the map, all five of these countries report to have a significant proportion of overweight and obesity in children, particularly in boys (HBSC, 2017/18 survey).



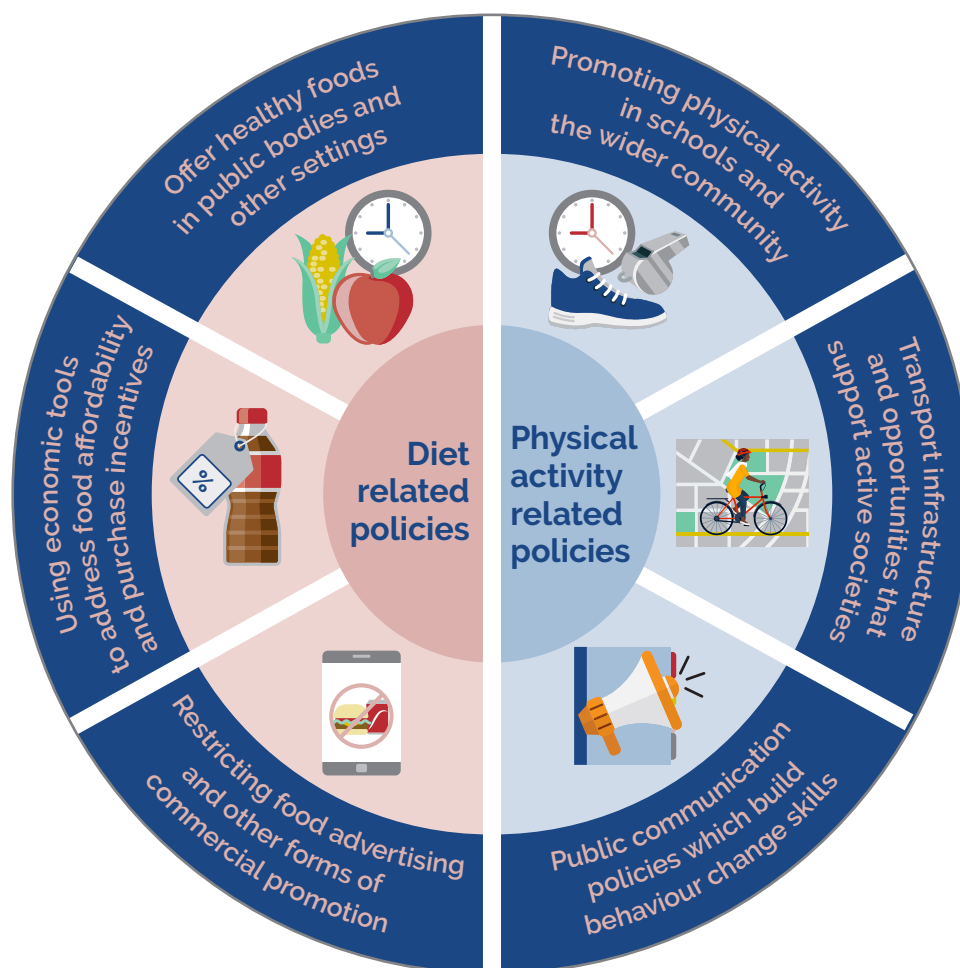
Methods

1. The five focus countries in the CO-CREATE project for youth creation activities were used – the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and the UK. In the UK, policy can be issued by the UK government or one of the three devolved administrations (Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland), which means we need to look at each home nation to understand nutrition and physical activity policy. For this policy brief, we have selected the home nation of England.
2. Three diet related and three physical activity related policy areas per country were chosen from the **NOURISHING and MOVING policy frameworks**. These six areas were selected due to their focus on youth and alignment with the **CO-CREATE Youth Declaration**, as well as the WHO's **Tackling NCDs: Best Buys**. The selected six policy areas are shown in the diagram below.

3. Relevant policies were taken from the **NOURISHING** and **MOVING** policy databases, which contain complete datasets of policies for the five countries in the chosen policy areas of **NOURISHING** and **MOVING**.
4. Two benchmarking tools for nutrition and physical activity policies, respectively reviewed the key attributes of policies in each area, assessed them against a scoring criterion, and generated an overall assessment of policy design.

The **NOURISHING** and **MOVING** benchmarking tools can be consulted online in full.

5. The six adolescent relevant policy areas have been analysed by country and the results have been compiled into the country information below. Each country card includes a narrative assessment of current policy status, suggestions to improve it, and an overall assessment of strength of policy design.





NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED POOR FAIR MODERATE GOOD EXCELLENT



current policy status



potential ways to improve current status

Diet related policy areas

	<p>Action on food and drink availability in schools, fruit and vegetable initiatives in schools and restrictions on unhealthy food in out-of-education locations.</p>	
	<p>Introduce mandatory regulations relating to sugar-sweetened beverage provision in schools and restrictions on food and drink availability within 400m of the school vicinity.</p>	
	<p>Action on health-related taxes (the Soft Drinks Industry Levy).</p>	
	<p>Expand coverage of health-related food taxes beyond sugary drinks. Implement subsidies to increase accessibility and affordability of healthy foods.</p>	
	<p>Current policy includes co/self-regulatory measures on advertising to young people, direct marketing and product placement.</p>	
	<p>Strengthen existing policies by implementing mandatory regulations that target under-19 year-olds. Expand coverage of regulations to include point of sale measures, sponsorship and product design and packaging, and advertising in/around schools.</p>	

Physical activity policy areas

	<p>Current action focuses on physical activity outside of school hours, as well as community and mass participation initiatives, and financial incentives to promote physical activity.</p>	
	<p>Implement mandatory rules on physical activity and education in schools, including outside of the classroom.</p>	
	<p>Current action only focuses on active transport.</p>	
	<p>Develop regulations to increase the provision of public transport and to promote active transport that target adolescents.</p>	
	<p>Current action focuses on physical activity guidelines and public campaigns promoting physical activity.</p>	
	<p>Public awareness campaigns should be improved to include social marketing that targets adolescents, among other specific populations.</p>	

*For more information on how we produced these assessments, consult our NOURISHING and MOVING policy briefs.



NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED

POOR

FAIR

MODERATE

GOOD

EXCELLENT



current policy status



potential ways to improve current status

Diet related policy areas

	<p> Current action focuses on school food standards, fruit and vegetable initiatives in schools, and unhealthy foods in other out-of-education settings.</p> <p> Implement mandatory regulations which cover foods offered at school beyond school hours. Ensure that food and drink available in the immediate vicinity of schools is healthy.</p>	<p>MODERATE</p>
	<p> No policies identified.</p> <p> Implement health- related food taxes and subsidies to increase affordability and accessibility of healthy food.</p>	<p>NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED</p>
	<p> Action is only taken in marketing to young people through advertising, point of sale measures, product placement and branding.</p> <p> Implement government-led and enforced food and drink advertising standards targeting under 19 year-olds.</p> <p> Expand marketing regulations to include direct marketing, sponsorship, product design, and advertising in/around the school area.</p>	<p>FAIR</p>

Physical activity policy areas

	<p> Action taken on physical activity in schools and physical education, physical activity in and outside of the classroom, and outside of school hours.</p> <p> Make current rules on physical activity in schools mandatory for both primary and secondary schools.</p> <p> Take action on community and mass participation initiatives which promote physical activity to the least active, vulnerable and marginalised populations.</p>	<p>MODERATE</p>
	<p> Current policy action focuses on active transport.</p> <p> Promote public and active transport to and from primary and secondary schools and work. Target adolescents, vulnerable and marginalised populations, and persons of all abilities.</p>	<p>POOR</p>
	<p> Physical activity guidelines are in place.</p> <p> Increase public awareness of physical activity by developing campaigns which include social marketing, and are aimed at adolescents and the least active, vulnerable, and marginalised populations.</p>	<p>FAIR</p>



NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED POOR FAIR MODERATE GOOD EXCELLENT



current policy status



potential ways to improve current status

Diet related policy areas

	<p>Current action focuses food standards in schools, including restrictions on unhealthy food, limits on sugar-sweetened beverage provision, and fruit and vegetable initiatives.</p>	
	<p>Expand regulations to include all food served on school premises beyond school hours and unhealthy foods in the vicinity of school.</p>	
	<p>Little action taken in using economic tools and purchase incentives to address food affordability and availability.</p>	
	<p>Implement subsidies to increase accessibility and affordability of healthy foods.</p>	
	<p>Current action focuses on advertising restrictions to young people, direct marketing, sponsorship, product placement and marketing in or around schools.</p>	
	<p>Expand current regulations to include point of sale measures, print and outdoor advertising, and product design and packaging.</p>	

Physical activity policy areas

	<p>Current action focuses on physical activity and education in schools, outside of school hours and of the classroom, community initiatives and financial incentives to promote physical activity.</p>	
	<p>Focus on specific target groups, including adolescents, as well as other specific populations such as least active, vulnerable and marginalised populations.</p>	
	<p>Current action focuses on public and active transport and communication campaigns promoting physical activity.</p>	
	<p>Improve road safety actions through mandatory legislation which targets people of all abilities, vulnerable, and marginalised populations, and adolescents.</p>	
	<p>Current action focuses only on physical activity guidelines.</p>	
	<p>Increase public awareness of physical activity by developing campaigns which include social marketing, and are aimed at adolescents and the least active, vulnerable, and marginalised populations.</p>	



NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED POOR FAIR MODERATE GOOD EXCELLENT



current policy status



potential ways to improve current status

Diet related policy areas

	<p>Current action focuses on standards for healthy food and drinks in schools, including restrictions on unhealthy foods and fruit and vegetable initiatives.</p>	
	<p>Improve action on limiting sugar-sweetened beverage provision in schools, as well as unhealthy food and drink within the immediate vicinity of schools.</p>	
	<p>Current action focuses on a sugary drinks tax.</p>	
	<p>Expand action on health-related food taxes beyond sugary drinks, and implement subsidies that increase affordability and accessibility of healthy foods.</p>	
	<p>Current action focuses only on marketing to under 12 year-olds through advertising.</p>	
	<p>Extend regulations to under 19 year-olds and apply them to direct marketing, sponsorship, point of sale, product placement and product packaging.</p>	

Physical activity policy areas

	<p>Current action focuses on physical activity in schools, outside of the classroom and school hours, community initiatives and financial incentives.</p>	
	<p>Introduce mandatory initiatives that target adolescents, as well as the least active and vulnerable populations.</p>	
	<p>No policies identified.</p>	
	<p>Develop regulations to increase the provision of public transport and to promote active transport that also target adolescents, people of all abilities and least active groups.</p>	
	<p>Current action focuses on physical activity guidelines.</p>	
	<p>Increase public awareness on physical activity via social marketing aimed at adolescents.</p>	



NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED POOR FAIR MODERATE GOOD EXCELLENT



current policy status



potential ways to improve current status

Diet related policy areas

	<p> Current action focuses on food standards in schools, including limiting sugar sweetened beverage provision, alongside regulations on unhealthy food in out of education locations.</p> <p> Improve current regulation through introducing mandatory regulations within 400m of primary and secondary schools.</p>	
	<p> Current action has only involved introducing an excise tax on sugar-sweetened drinks.</p> <p> Introduce subsidies and other financial incentives to increase healthy food affordability and accessibility.</p>	
	<p> Action was focused on unhealthy foods advertising to young people, including online and in/around schools.</p> <p> Improve current regulations by targeting them to under 19 year-olds. Expand coverage to direct marketing to young people, sponsorship, point of sale measures, product placement, and product packaging and design.</p>	

Physical activity policy areas

	<p> Current action focuses on physical activity and education in schools, outside of school hours, the classroom and in the community.</p> <p> Target initiatives to adolescents, as well as people of all abilities, the least active, and vulnerable populations.</p>	
	<p> Current action focuses on road safety and promotion of public transport.</p> <p> Improve action by introducing communication campaigns that promote public transport by targeting adolescents, as well as marginalised populations.</p>	
	<p> Current action only focuses on physical activity guidelines.</p> <p> Improve public awareness via social marketing campaigns with a focus on adolescents, as well as marginalised populations.</p>	

Policy index results

The table below indicates the strength of policy design for the six adolescent-relevant policy areas that have been reviewed. Adolescent focused diet-related policies for each selected area were reviewed to see how healthy diets were promoted among adolescents. Physical activity policies for each selected area were reviewed to see how physical activity can be increased among adolescents.

For results on other policy areas, and for more details about how we produced these assessments, consult the full [NOURISHING](#) and [MOVING](#) indexes.

Policy area		England	Norway	Poland	Portugal	Netherlands
Diet related policy	O Offer healthy food and set standards in public institutions and other specific settings	MODERATE	MODERATE	FAIR	MODERATE	MODERATE
	U Use economic tools to address food affordability and purchase incentives	MODERATE	FAIR	MODERATE	MODERATE	NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED
	R Restrict food advertising and other forms of commercial promotion	FAIR	MODERATE	POOR	POOR	FAIR
Physical activity policy	M Make opportunities and initiatives that promote physical activity in schools, the community and sport and recreation	MODERATE	MODERATE	GOOD	MODERATE	MODERATE
	I Implement transport infrastructure and opportunities that support active societies	FAIR	MODERATE	NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED	FAIR	POOR
	N Normalise and increase physical activity through public communication that motivates and build behaviour change skills	GOOD	FAIR	FAIR	MODERATE	FAIR

Overview of policy status

NO POLICIES IDENTIFIED

POOR

FAIR

MODERATE

GOOD

EXCELLENT

Discussion

The policy areas discussed throughout this brief show that each of the five countries have a variety of policies in place to promote healthy diets and physical activity, with varying levels of strength.

The policy index has highlighted where there are gaps, as no country is scored as having excellent quality policy design in both nutrition and physical activity. Within this sample of countries and policy areas, advertising and marketing restrictions were the weakest areas within nutrition policy. In contrast, we see a comparatively stronger assessment for food school standards in all countries but Poland.

In physical activity, the best designed policies relate to opportunities and initiatives that promote physical activity in schools, the community, and sport and recreation. The weakest policy design is seen in implementing transport infrastructure policies that support active societies, with the Netherlands identified as having the weakest policy design and Poland having no policy implemented.

Policy design was strong in physical activity policy for England around normalising and increasing physical activity through public communication that motivates and builds behaviour change skills. Poland's strongest policy design was in opportunities and initiatives that promote physical activity in schools, the community and sport and recreation, albeit both countries have significant room for improvement.

Limitations

The brief does not provide a comprehensive overview or analysis of all implemented policies within a country related to diet and physical activity. The recommendations are therefore limited and do not reflect the whole policy landscape within a country. That landscape will be subject to modification over time as more policies are implemented.

Conclusion

This snapshot shows key gaps in policy design in all countries and policy areas featured within this brief.

Complete policy index results for a total of 30 countries, including the five discussed in this brief, are available:

- [**NOURISHING policy brief and country snapshots**](#)
- [**MOVING policy brief and country snapshots**](#)

Resources

For resources and tools to address the challenges of childhood obesity, follow the links below:

[Tools and resources for youth](#)

[Further information on childhood obesity](#)

[An overview of childhood obesity rates across Europe](#)

[A database of implemented government policy actions to promote healthy eating, and to prevent obesity and non-communicable diseases](#)

[An overview of physical activity rates across the globe](#)



About Co-Create

Funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, Confronting Obesity: Co-creating policy with youth – known as the CO-CREATE project – is led by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health and brings together 14 international research and advocacy organisations to work with young people to create, inform and promote policies for obesity prevention.

co-create.eu

Acknowledgements

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This brief was produced by World Cancer Research Fund International as part of the CO-CREATE project. World Cancer Research Fund International is a leading authority on cancer prevention research related to diet, weight and physical activity.

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World Cancer Research Fund International is a not-for-profit organisation and part of an international network of cancer prevention charities. These charities are based in Europe and the Americas, along with representation in Asia, giving us a global voice to inform people about cancer prevention.



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