K.4. Nutrition and eating disorders

**Identifying the most effective public health nutrition policies: The views of policy-makers and thought-leaders across 14 EU countries**

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**Background**

EuroHeart 2 is a European research programme led by the European Heart Network and European Society of Cardiology. One aspect of the project aimed to identify the most effective public health nutrition policies, in order to inform future evidence-based strategies to promote cardiovascular health.

**Methods**

We mapped national nutrition policies across 30 European countries. We identified contacted and recruited potential participants in 14 diverse countries. Policy-makers, thought-leaders and others active in the field of public health nutrition at the national level were interviewed. Questions were developed and piloted with senior stakeholders in the United Kingdom. The interviews were conducted in English, either by person, telephone or Skype. The interviews typically lasted 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews were transcribed and entered into NVIVO. The Framework approach was used for analysis.

**Results**

66 interviews were conducted in 14 countries across Europe. The interviews enabled more up to date and accurate information than was provided on websites or in reports. Responses revealed important differences between official lists of food policies and their actual implementation. European countries are at very different stages of addressing public health nutrition issues. Most are promoting dialogue, recommendations and guidelines. Voluntary reformulation of foods is also common, especially for salt, sugar and total fat. However, legislation regulation or fiscal interventions targeting salt, sugar, fat or fruit and vegetable consumption are still uncommon. Many interviewees expressed a preference for regulation and fiscal interventions and generally believed they were more effective, albeit politically more challenging. Conversely, information-based interventions were often seen as being more politically feasible.

**Conclusions**

Public health nutrition policies in Europe represent a complex, dynamic and rapidly changing arena. Encouragingly, the majority of countries are engaged in activities intended to increase consumption of healthy food, and decrease the intake of junk food and sugary drinks. Exemplar countries...
demonstrating notable progress might include Finland, Norway, Iceland, Hungary, the United Kingdom and Portugal. However, most countries fall well short of optimal activities. Implementation of potentially powerful nutrition policies remains patchy across Europe.

Key messages
- Population-wide policy actions to promote a healthy diet offer potentially large benefits in terms of reducing the CVD burden. However, all interventions are not equally effective.
- The evidence suggests that the largest effects might be achieved by comprehensive, multi-level interventions targeted at decreasing salt or trans fats, or increasing fruit and vegetable consumption.