

The Policy Evaluation Network (PEN)

Advancing the evidence base for public policies impacting on dietary behaviour, physical activity and sedentary behaviour in Europe

What is already known on this topic

Priority of the problem

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of global mortality. Action is needed to tackle important causes of many NCDs: low physical activity levels and unhealthy dietary behaviours. These behaviours are driven by upstream factors, and successful policy interventions are required that encourage healthy dietary behaviours, improve physical activity levels and reduce sedentary behaviours of entire populations.

Addressing research needs

At the start of PEN, no systematic research on the implementation or evaluation of policy interventions across Europe were available. Consequently, gaps in our knowledge existed, as we had no information on the impact or on the implementation of policy interventions across Europe, and no guidance or recommendations on how to develop this knowledge with appropriate research designs, methods and tools.

What PEN adds

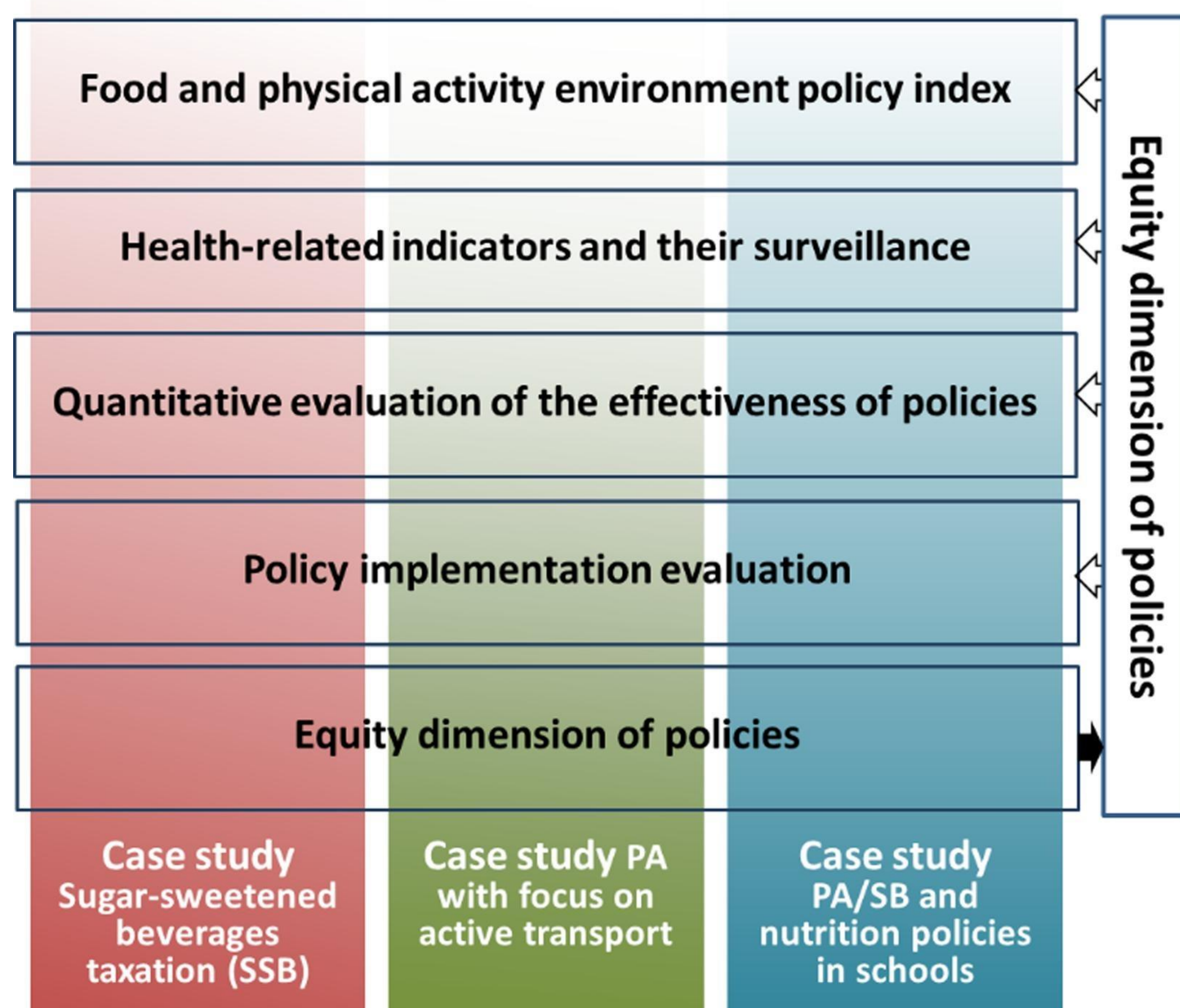


Figure 1. Overview of Research Areas PEN

The key objectives of PEN were to advance our knowledge on the effective implementation of policies and their impact in terms of improving health behaviours.

More specifically, PEN aimed to:

- Adapt and implement a Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI) and develop a Physical Activity Environment Policy Index (PA-EPI);
- Map health-related indicators needed to assess the impact of policy interventions;
- Refine quantitative methods to evaluate the impact of public policies;
- Identify key factors, barriers and facilitators of implementation of policy interventions;
- Summarise the requirements for policy interventions to reach vulnerable groups;
- Provide an in-depth assessment of existing exemplary policies: SSB taxation, active transport policies, and school policies on nutrition and physical activity.

Policy-relevant Advancements

PEN established a multi-disciplinary research network with 28 research centres from seven European countries and New Zealand. Since its start this resulted in considerable advancements, including:

1. Benchmarking of the current situation in European public policies affecting the food and physical activity policy environments.
2. Development and prioritization of a set of indicators for dietary behaviours, physical activity, and sedentary behaviours, measured using instruments that can be used by existing surveillance systems.
3. Development of methods for the quantitative evaluation of the impact of policies, considering experimental settings and observational data.
4. Improvement of knowledge on the implementation dimension of policies, more specifically: (i) the process of implementation, (ii) facilitators and barriers for implementation and (iii) the evaluation of the implementation process.
5. Explorations of equity dimension of policies, through a better understanding of the impact of policies on lower socio-economic and ethnic minority groups in a crosstalk with research areas.



For further information please scan the QR code

Further reading:

Website: www.jpi-pen.eu

Scientific publication outlining the background and work: Lakerveld J, et al. Advancing the evidence base for public policies impacting on dietary behaviour, physical activity and sedentary behaviour in Europe: The Policy Evaluation Network promoting a multidisciplinary approach. Food Policy. 2020; 96.