

# The Food – Environmental Policy Index (EPI): European Union



An assessment of EU-level policies influencing food environments and priority actions to create healthy food environments in the EU

Ms Sanne Djojosoeparto, Utrecht University  
Dr Maartje Poelman, Wageningen University & Research  
Dr Carlijn Kamphuis, Utrecht University  
Dr Janas Harrington, University College Cork, Ireland  
Dr Stefanie Vandevijvere, Sciensano, Belgium / INFORMAS



# Research team



Sanne Djojosoeparto



Carlijn Kamphuis



Maartje Poelman



Stefanie Vandevijvere



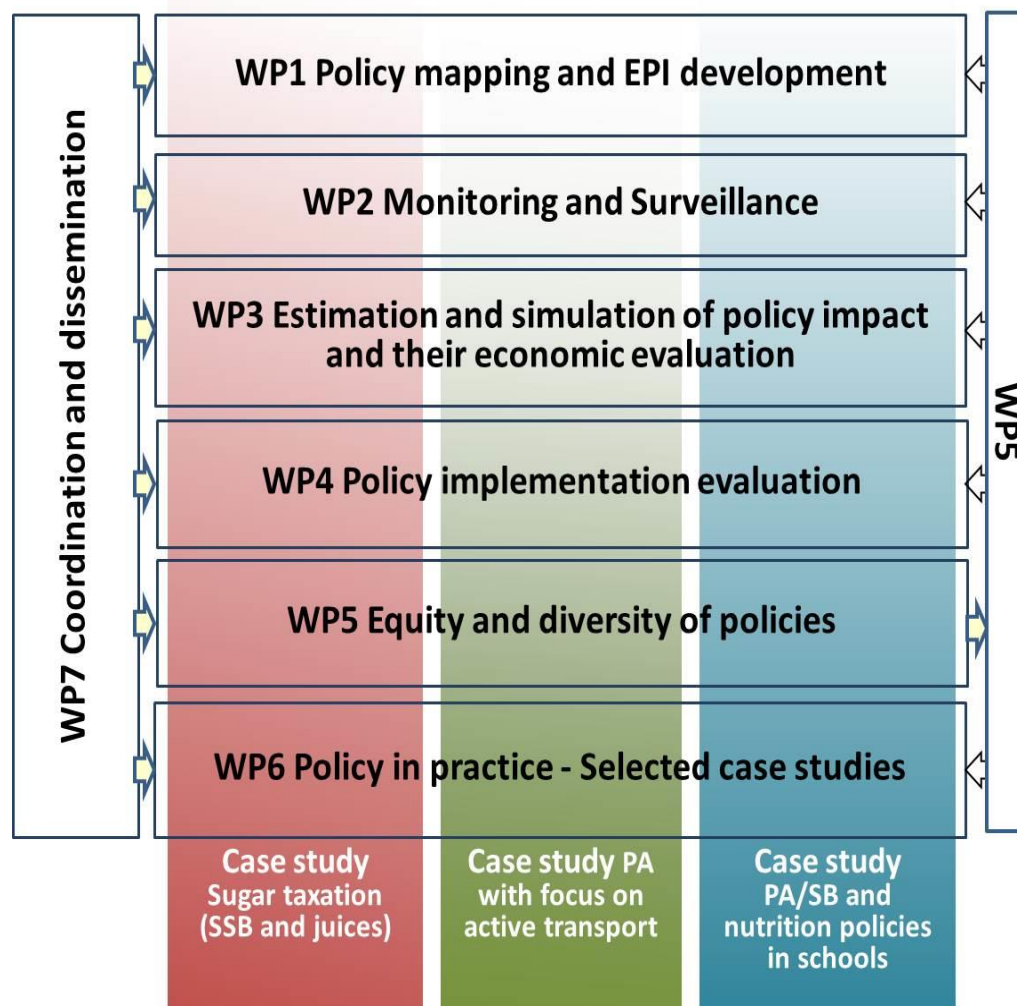
Janas Harrington



School of  
Public Health

# Policy Evaluation Network (PEN)

- Policy Evaluation Network (PEN):** a network of researchers from 28 institutes in seven European countries and New-Zealand, with the aim to monitor, benchmark, and evaluate policies to promote a healthy diet and physical activity



<https://www.jpi-pen.eu/>

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An assessment of EU-level policies influencing food environments and priority actions to create healthy food environments in the EU

March 2021



Utrecht University



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# The Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI): European Union

An overview of EU-level policies influencing food environments in EU Member States

August 2020



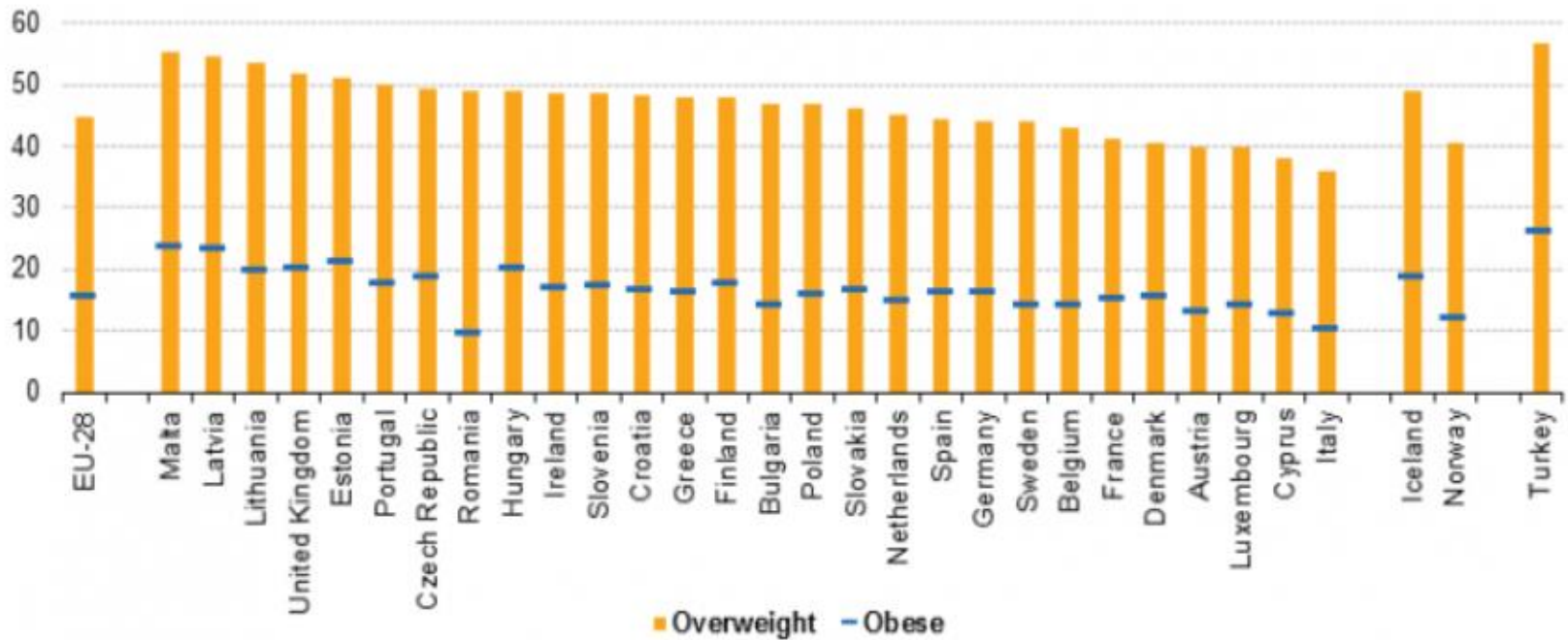
Utrecht University



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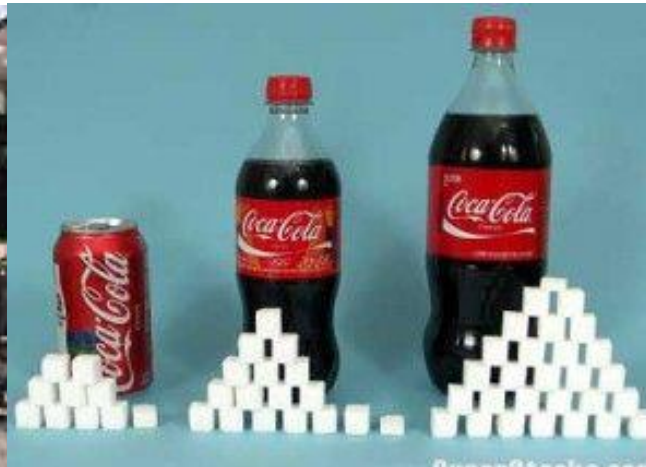






Note: population aged 18 and over.

Proportion of overweight and of obese women, 2014 *Source: Eurostat*



# Food environments – Role of the EU

- **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Art 168 (Public Health)**
  - A high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Union policies and activities.
  - Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues (white paper) / EU action plan on childhood obesity 2014-2020
  - The EU does not define health policies or the organisation of health services.
- **Common Agriculture Policy**
  - (e.g., Fruit and Vegetable Scheme a School Milk Scheme)
- **European Green deal / Farm to Fork strategy**
  - Recognizes the inextricable links between healthy people, healthy societies and a healthy planet.

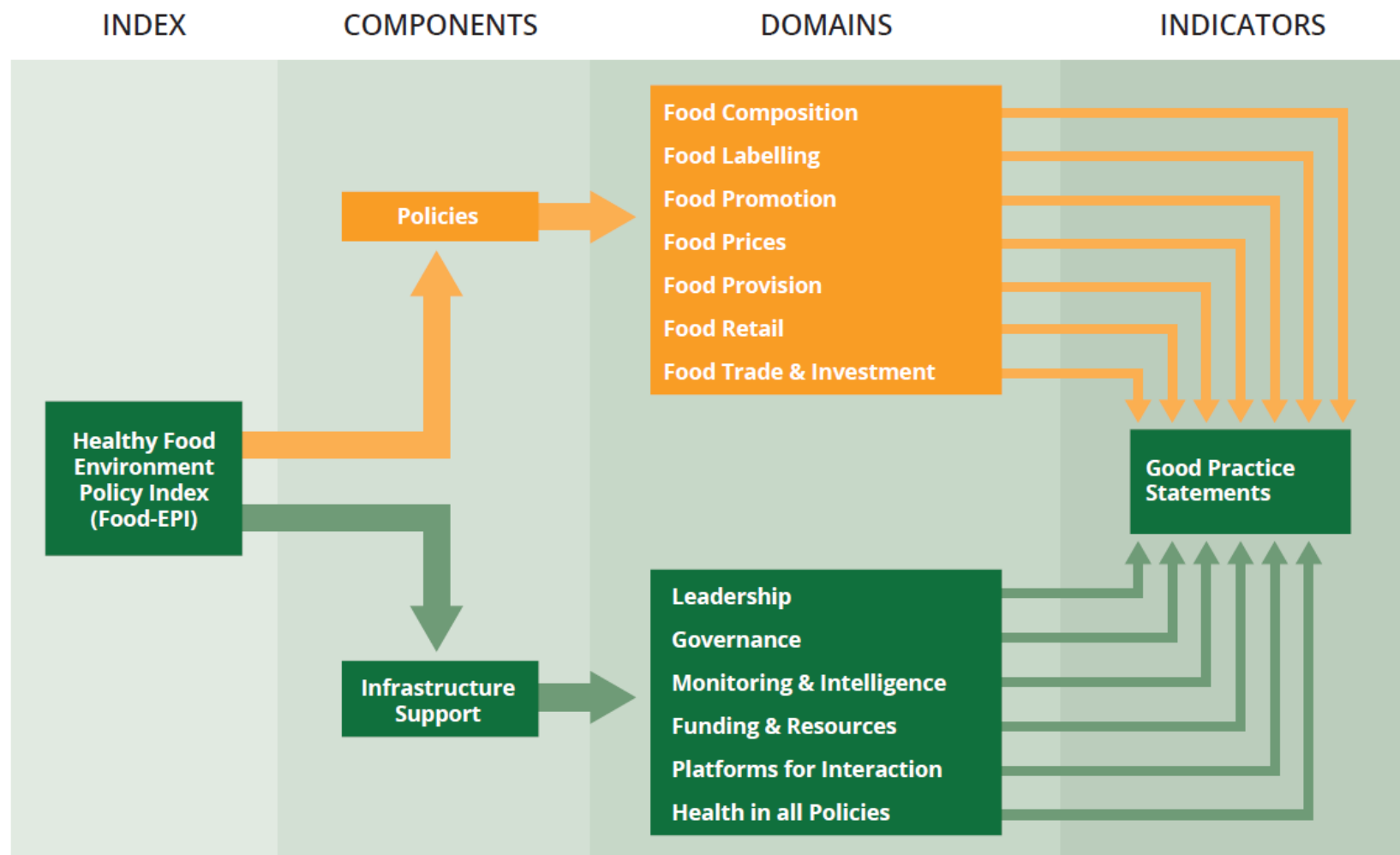


*“The creation of a favourable food environment that makes it easier to choose healthy and sustainable diets will benefit consumers’ health and quality of life, and reduce health-related costs for society”*

# The Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI)

- ‘Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI)’.
- International Network for Food and Obesity/Non-communicable Diseases Research, Monitoring and Action Support (INFORMAS).
- **Tool** and **systematic process** to assess the strength of policies and infrastructure support for creating healthy food environments and identify and prioritize actions to improve food environments.
- Globally, the Food-EPI has been applied in more than 20 countries.
- As part of PEN, the Food-EPI has been applied in the Netherlands, Ireland, Norway, Germany and Poland

# The Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI)

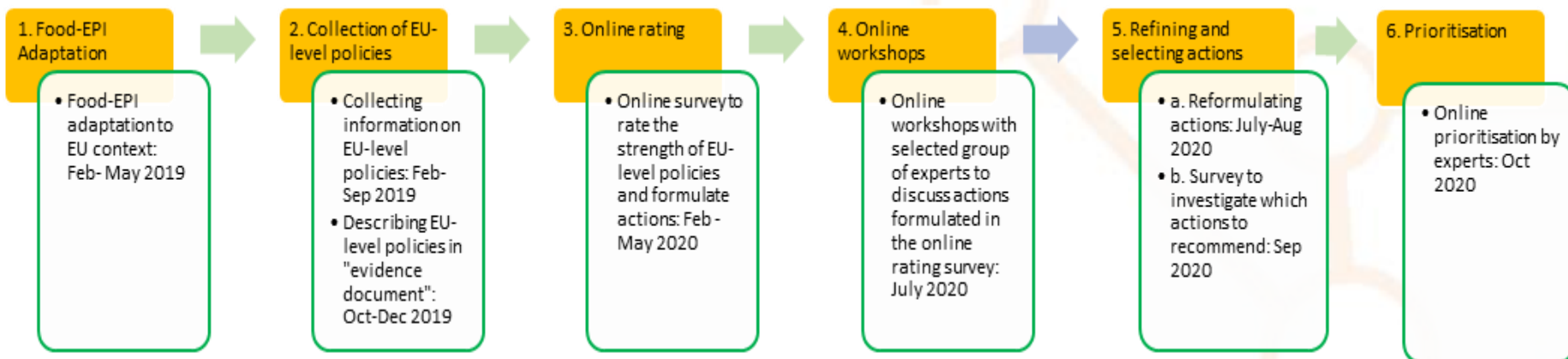




## Aims of our Food-EPI research

1. To provide an overview of EU-level policies with a direct or indirect (potential) influence on food environments;
2. To assess the strength of EU-level policies and infrastructure support and identify implementation gaps, by non-government, independent experts;
3. To identify and prioritise policy and infrastructure support actions to create healthy food environments in the EU taking into account importance, achievability and equity, by non-government, independent experts.

# The EU Food-EPI Process



<https://www.jpi-pen.eu/reports.html>

## The EU Food-EPI expert panel

- 62 independent, non-government experts were invited specialized in public health, nutrition, obesity and diet-related chronic diseases, food or health policy.
- **29 experts** fully completed the **online rating survey**.
- **16 experts** participated in the **second online survey** to indicate which actions to recommend to the EU.
- **21 experts** participated in the **online prioritisation survey**.

## Methods (1)

- **Step 3: Online rating survey**

- Experts assessed the strength of EU-level policies for 50 indicators on a scale from 1 tot 5 (no/very weak policy; weak policy; moderate policy; strong policy; very strong policy)



- Experts policy and infrastructure support actions for the EU to create a healthy food environment.

- **Step 4: Online workshops with a selected group experts**

- Actions formulated in the online rating survey have been discussed, refined and complemented.

## Methods (2)

- **Step 5: Second online survey for the selection of recommended actions**
  - Experts have indicated for each action on a scale from 1 to 5 (very much disagree to very much agree) if they agreed with recommending the action to the EU -> final list of 19 policy actions and 18 infrastructure support actions
- **Step 6: Online prioritisation by experts**
  - 19 policy actions were ranked on importance, achievability and equity
  - 18 infrastructure support actions were ranked on importance and achievability



# Results online rating survey

Domain	Indicators	No/very weak policy	Weak policy	Moderate policy	Strong policy	Very strong policy
Food Composition	Food composition targets processed foods					
	Food composition targets out-of-home meals					
Food Labelling	Ingredient lists and nutrient declarations					
	Nutrition and health claims					
	Front-of-pack labelling					
	Menu board labelling					
Food Promotion	Restricting unhealthy food promotion to children (broadcast media)					
	Restricting unhealthy food promotion to children (social media)					
	Restricting unhealthy food promotion to children (non-broadcast media)					
	Restricting unhealthy food promotion where children gather					
	Restricting unhealthy food promotion to children on packaging					
Food Prices	Reducing taxes on healthy foods					
	Increasing taxes on unhealthy foods					
	Food subsidies to favour healthy foods					
	Food-related income-support for healthy foods					
Food Provision	Policies in schools promote healthy food choices					
	Policies in public sector settings promote healthy food choices					
	Healthy Public procurement standards					
	Support and training systems (public sector)					
	Support and training systems (private companies)					
Food Retail	Zoning laws limit unhealthy food outlets					
	Zoning laws encourages healthy food outlets					
	Promote relative availability healthy foods in-store					
	Promote relative availability healthy foods service outlets					
Food Trade	Risk impact assessments trade and investment agreements					
	Measures to manage investment and protect regulatory capacity					

# Results online rating survey

Domain	Indicators	No/very weak policy	Weak policy	Moderate policy	Strong policy	Very strong policy
Leadership	Strong visible political support					
	Clear Population intake targets					
	Food-based dietary guidelines					
	Comprehensive implementation plan for nutrition					
	Priorities for reducing health inequalities					
Governance	Restricting commercial influence on policy development					
	Use of evidence in food policies					
	Transparency in development of food policies					
	Public access to nutrition information					
Monitoring & Intelligence	Monitoring food environments					
	Monitoring nutrition status and intakes					
	Monitoring overweight and obesity					
	Monitoring NCD risk factors and prevalence					
	Evaluation of programmes & policies					
	Monitoring progress towards reducing health inequalities					
Funding & Resources	Population nutrition budget					
	Funding obesity and NCDs prevention research					
	Statutory health promotion agency					
Platforms for Interaction	Co-ordination (between local and national government)					
	Platforms between government and food sector					
	Platforms between government and civil society					
	Systems-based approach with local and national organisations					
Health in all policies	Assessing public health impacts of food policies					
	Assessing public health impacts of non-food policies					

## Conclusions online rating survey

- Weak/very weak policies with a direct influence on the food environment.
  - 65% of the 26 policy indicators were rated weak
  - 23% of the 26 policy indicators were rated very weak/non-existent
- EU infrastructure support was rated somewhat better.
  - Experts rated 63% of the 24 indicators as moderate
  - ‘public access to nutrition information’ was rated strong by the experts.

## Recommended policy and infrastructure support actions

- In total, experts recommend **19 policy actions** to the EU.
- In total, experts recommend **18 infrastructure support actions** to the EU.
- We present the top five policy actions (most important, achievable and potential to reduce socioeconomic inequalities in diet) and the top five infrastructure support actions (most important and achievable).

# Top 5 policy actions

Require Member States to implement (1) restrictions or bans on the (online) marketing of foods high in saturated fat, trans fat, salt or added sugars to children and adolescents up to 19 years old in all digital media and (2) bans on marketing on food packages.



Allow Member States to implement a VAT exemption of 0% for all fresh fruit and vegetables.



Set mandatory, ambitious, comprehensive and time-specific food composition targets for all food categories.

Set mandatory, ambitious and comprehensive reformulation targets for processed and ultra-processed foods and meals sold at quick service restaurants.



Adopt a legislated ban on trans fats in processed and ultra-processed foods.



# Top 5 infrastructure support actions

Develop a high-level NCDs Prevention Strategy.



Include clear priorities to reduce inequalities or protect vulnerable populations in the multi-annual work programmes/ annual State of the Union.

Harmonise the promotion of healthy diets with other issues of concern such as climate change and environmental protection.



Benchmark food environment policies and support and coordinate the exchange of good practices between Member States.



Recommend and support Member States to set up a monitoring system to assess the status of food environments, and to measure progress on achieving the goals of nutrition and health plans.

## Final recommendations

- We recommend the EU to immediately implement all top-5 listed actions, but the other recommended actions by the experts are also important (37 in total).
- Multiple structural, universal, preventive measures both at national and EU level, targeted at the entire population, are needed to stimulate healthy food choices.
- The experts in this study indicated that the EU can and should do more to create healthy food environments within these competences.

Thank you for your attention!

Link to the EU Food-EPI report:

[https://www.jpi-pen.eu/images/reports/20210305\\_Food-EPI\\_EU\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.jpi-pen.eu/images/reports/20210305_Food-EPI_EU_FINAL.pdf)

In case of questions, you can contact:

Maartje Poelman ([maartje.poelman@wur.nl](mailto:maartje.poelman@wur.nl)) or  
Sanne Djojosoeparto ([s.k.djojosoeparto@uu.nl](mailto:s.k.djojosoeparto@uu.nl))