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Addressing childhood obesity across Europe:

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

www.co-create.eu



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INTRODUCTION

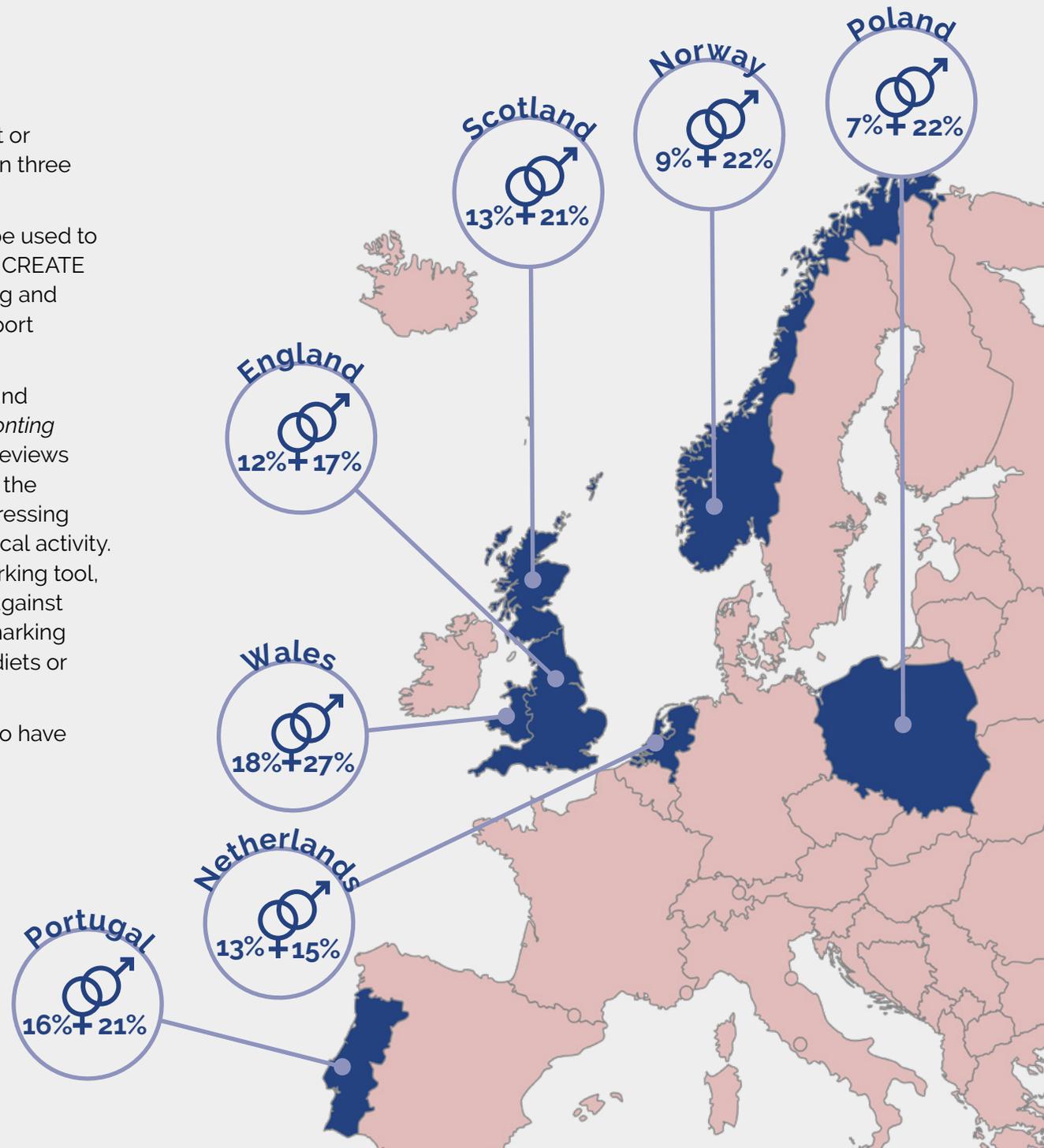
Over 338 million children¹ globally are affected by overweight or obesity, and according to data from WHO Europe (2014) one in three European 11-year-olds are overweight or obese.^{2,3}

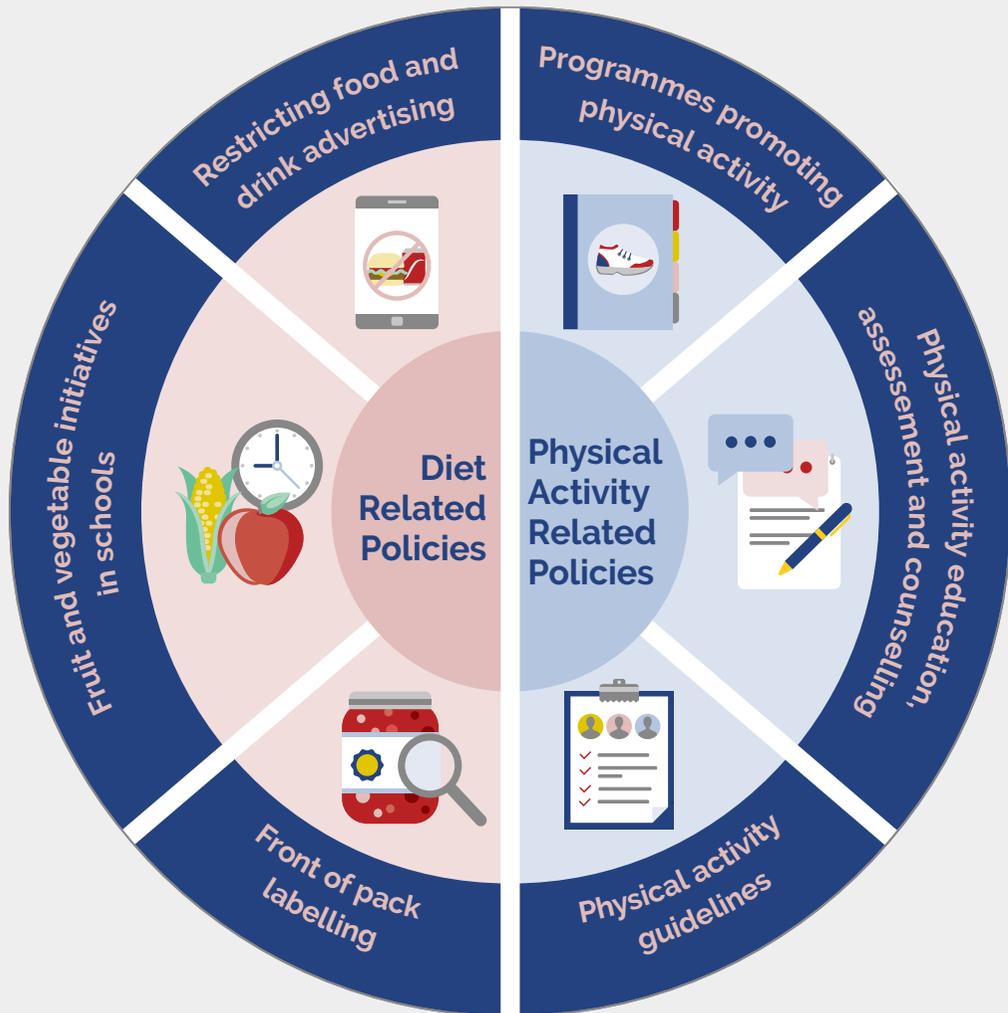
However, childhood obesity is preventable and policies can be used to promote healthy diets and increase physical activity. The CO-CREATE project works to address childhood obesity through educating and empowering adolescents to advocate for policies which support making the healthiest choice the preferred 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*³ – 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. A selection of policies have been assessed using a benchmarking tool, which reviews the key attributes and strengths of the policy against a scoring criteria, to generate an overall % score. The benchmarking tool looks at how effective policies are at promoting healthy diets or increasing physical activity.

As shown through the map, all five of these countries report to have a significant proportion of overweight and obesity in children, particularly boys (HBSC, 2013/14 survey).

What is the percentage of 15-year-olds that are living with overweight or obesity?⁴





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.
2. Three diet-related and three physical activity related policy areas per country were chosen from the NOURISHING⁵ and MOVING⁶ policy frameworks. These six areas were selected due to their focus on youth, alignment with WHO's *Tackling NCDs: Best Buys*⁶ and because each country had implemented policies within these areas for comparability. The selected six policy areas are shown in the diagram on the left.
3. A policy was selected from each of the six policy areas for each country from World Cancer Research Fund International's⁷ NOURISHING⁸ and MOVING policy databases.
4. A benchmarking tool reviewed the key attributes of each policy, assessed them against a scoring criteria and generated an individual score.
5. Country obesity data for youths aged 15 was identified from the Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children study.⁹
6. An analysis of the benchmarking results generated findings, which have been presented in country scorecards.

The policy snapshots have been analysed by country. These results have been compiled into the country scorecards below. These scorecards show each country's; childhood obesity information through its percentage of youth's aged 15 who are living with overweight or obesity; policy summaries; potential ways to improve the policy summarised; and a percentage score calculated by the benchmarking tool, showing the strength of the policy (0 is the weakest score possible, while 100 indicates the strongest possible policy); and links to further information.

⁶ The MOVING framework is World Cancer Research Fund International's latest policy database. Launching mid-2020, it will be a repository of national-level policies on Physical Activity.



Diet Related Policies

	'Do I choose healthy?' app / 'Kies Ik Gezond?' app (2018)	The Netherlands Government has developed a phone app which allows consumers to access nutritional information through scanning a product's barcode. However, the process required to readily access nutritional information relies on consumers having immediate access to technology and internet.	69%
		Implement a Nutri-Score front of pack label in 2020.	
	The EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme (2017)	The Netherlands participates in the EU School Fruits Scheme, which provides primary and secondary schools with free fruit if requested. However, it is not compulsory for schools to participate.	80%
		Ensure the EU School Fruits Scheme is mandatory for all schools.	
	Dutch Self-Regulation Advertising Code for Food Products (2015)	The Netherlands' food and drink marketing system is self-regulated, allowing food and drink, advertising, and broadcasting industry to write and regulate their codes without government input.	33%
		Implement government-led and enforced food and drink marketing and broadcasting standards.	

Physical Activity Policies

	The Daily Mile (date unknown)	This policy allows pupils and teachers to take a 15-minute break at least three times a week to run approximately a mile, to improve the pupils concentration and fitness.	33%
		Make this programme mandatory for all schools.	
	Physical activity guidelines (2017)	The guidelines outline the minimum physical activity levels necessary for adults, older people and children from four to 18 years of age.	33%
		The guidelines should be disseminated through mass communication campaigns and paired with interventions encouraging physical activity.	
	B-Fit (2014)	The B-Fit intervention aims to tackle the obesity and mobility in young people aged two-14 through education on how to acquire and maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle.	27%
		The government should provide funding for this programme so schools can then be automatically enrolled without membership fees.	

For more information on childhood obesity in the Netherlands, please click [here](#).

"Everyone should live healthier. We need more healthy restaurants; we need marketing of healthy products and sports." – Youth from the Netherlands



Diet Related Policies

	The Keyhole Logo (2009)	<p> The Keyhole Logo used in Norway has positive qualities such as its interpretive element. However, it only highlights the healthy aspects of the products and is a voluntary initiative.</p>	62%
		<p> Change the Keyhole initiative to be mandatory and to include the information about the product's unhealthy nutritional information.</p>	
	The Norwegian School Fruit Scheme (2014)	<p> The voluntary fruit and vegetable for children scheme allows parents to opt for their primary school aged child to receive free fruit and vegetables.</p>	40%
		<p> Extend the scheme to automatically cover all children, including those in secondary school.</p>	
	Memorandum of Cooperation between MoH and food and soft drinks industry (2013)	<p> This voluntary marketing of food and beverages initiative involves government requestion industry follow their guidelines. The guidelines cover broadcasting where over 50% of the audience is children aged under 13.</p>	33%
		<p> Apply the policy to all broadcasting children under 18 years of age are exposed to, even if they make up under 50% of the viewing audience.</p>	

Physical Activity Policies

	The open-air school (2014)	<p> These holiday schools offer local children and youth (primarily 10–13 years old) local activities such as canoeing, climbing, fishing, nailing, playing, geocaching and swimming.</p>	63%
		<p> This programme should be extended to include children up to 18 years of age.</p>	
	General physical activity guidelines for children, young, adults, elderly and pregnant (2014)	<p> The Norwegian Directorate of Health published national guidelines on sedentary behaviour, which highlight that everyone should reduce their sedentary behaviour.</p>	33%
		<p> These guidelines should be expanded to include a dissemination plan.</p>	
	Learning in the open air (2006)	<p> The national school programme offers school's whose outdoor council have opted-in support such as courses, activities and equipment, to make it easier to teach classes outside. The programme encourages both physical activity and student's relationship with nature.</p>	10%
		<p> Make every outdoor council automatically opt-in.</p>	

For more information on childhood obesity in Norway, please click [here](#).

Diet Related Policies

	<p>The Choices Logo (2008)</p>	<p> Whilst being a pioneering labelling scheme within the EU, the Choices Logo is voluntary, does not include numerical information and shows only positive nutrition qualities.</p> <p> Implement a compulsory front of pack label which includes numerical and unhealthy nutrition information.</p>	<p>54%</p>
	<p>The EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme (2017)</p>	<p> Poland has implemented the EU school fruits scheme, providing free fruit only to primary schools across Poland.</p> <p> Extend the scheme to cover secondary schools.</p>	<p>70%</p>
	<p>The Amended Act on Food and Nutrition Safety (2015)</p>	<p> Poland regulates which food and drink advertisements are allowed inside schools. However, this policy does not cover advertisements outside of school grounds which children are exposed to.</p> <p> Expand the policy to protect children from advertising outside school grounds.</p>	<p>70%</p>

Physical Activity Policies

	<p>Sports Club School Programme (SKS) (date unknown)</p>	<p> This programme aims to give extra time for physical activity for primary and secondary school students. This is done through physical activity run by a physical activity teacher in participating schools.</p> <p> Make the programme mandatory for all schools.</p>	<p>78%</p>
	<p>WHO – Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health (2010)</p>	<p> Poland has adopted the <i>WHO physical activity guidelines</i>⁴⁰ for all. The recommendations set out address three age groups, including 5–17 year olds.</p> <p> These guidelines should be disseminated through mass campaign and include signposting to services or more.</p>	<p>11%</p>
	<p>The National Talent Base (date unknown)</p>	<p> This is an online tool which can measure and assess children's physical health. It can be used by parents, trainers, teachers, research teams, employees of state administration and children themselves.</p> <p> Expand this tool to include advice and counselling for children with obesity-related issues.</p>	<p>67%</p>

For more information on childhood obesity in Poland, please click [here](#).



Diet Related Policies

	EU Regulation No. 1169/2011 on the Provision of Food Information to Consumers (2011)	<p> Portugal has adopted an EU food and beverage labelling policy, which allows industry to use any form of front of pack labelling on their products.</p> <p> Implement a standard government-led front of pack labelling system.</p>	62%
	The EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme (2017)	<p> Portugal uses the EU School Fruit Scheme, which provides free fruit to primary school children.</p> <p> Include secondary school students in the scheme.</p>	70%
	The Portuguese Pledge, modelled after the EU Pledge¹¹ (2010)	<p> Portugal's advertising to children pledge is applied to children aged 12 and under, and is written and enforced by the advertising industry.</p> <p> Make the code be written and regulated by the government and applied to all children under 18 years of age.</p>	70%

Physical Activity Policies

	Cycling goes to School (2018)	<p> This project aims to promote the use of bicycles in primary schools, including to students with special education needs.</p> <p> Extend the project to include secondary schools.</p>	50%
	Infographics about Physical Activity (date unknown)	<p> These are physical activity infographics, which include specific recommendations for infants (0–5), children (5–18 years old), adults, the elderly and pregnant women.</p> <p> Extend the guidelines to include their dissemination through campaigns and signposting to more information.</p>	11%
	School Sports Programme (2017–2021)	<p> This programme aims to give extra time for physical activity for primary and secondary school students. This is done through physical activity run by a physical activity teacher in participating schools.</p> <p> Make the programme mandatory for all schools.</p>	45%

For more information on childhood obesity in Portugal, please click [here](#).

“Cost of unhealthy food should be more cheaper and unhealthy food be more expensive” – Youth from the UK



Diet Related Policies

	The Front of Pack Nutrition Labelling Scheme (2013)	<p> The front of pack labelling policy includes positive and negative nutrient information but is not mandatory. Therefore, consumers cannot benefit from consistent health information across a range of products.</p> <p> Make the front of pack labelling system mandatory.</p>	69%
	The School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme (2004)	<p> The UK has a fruit and vegetables in schools' programme, which provides the option of free fruit to publicly funded primary schools. Children in secondary schools are not included.</p> <p> Include all children under 18 years of age automatically in the scheme.</p>	70%
	Advertising ban in public transport network (2019)	<p> This policy does not allow unhealthy foods and beverages to be advertised on London's public transport network (TFL). Only unhealthy products with evidence they do not contribute to childhood obesity can be advertised.</p> <p> Extend this policy to prohibit advertising unhealthy products anywhere within London children may be exposed to.</p>	47%

Physical Activity Policies

	Bikeability (2010)	<p> Bikeability is the UK Government's cycle-training for school-children programme. It provides a range of cycling activities to schools and is available to every local body.</p> <p> Ensure all schools are automatically enrolled in the programme.</p>	50%
	UK Physical Activity Guidelines (2019)	<p> These guidelines follow a life-course approach and include guidelines for each specific age-groups (under-5's, 5-18's, adults, and adults 65+) and for certain people groups, such as pregnant women.</p> <p> The guidelines should include signposting to additional information, such as programmes which support the behaviour change.</p>	67%
	Royal College of General Physicians Physical Activity and Lifestyle Toolkit (2019)	<p> The Toolkit was designed for use by primary care professionals in the UK to promote physical activity to patients by providing a range of resources and advice. This includes advice for with obesity-related issue.</p> <p> Extend the toolkit to become guidelines or standards for all health-care professionals.</p>	60%

For more information on childhood obesity in the UK, please click [here](#).

SUMMARY

The sample of policies discussed throughout this brief show that each of the five countries have varying policies in place to address childhood obesity, with varying levels of strength. The simple analysis has highlighted where there are gaps and how each policy could be strengthened. Of the countries looked at, the UK was identified as having the strongest policies overall, albeit with significant room for improvement. Follow-up research is due to be carried out in order to analyse the selected policies within the context of the full range of policies available in each country, as available through the MOVING and NOURISHING policy databases.

The table below indicates the strength of policies that have been reviewed. Diet-related policies were reviewed to see how healthy diets were promoted. Physical activity policies were reviewed to see how physical activity can be increased.

Stronger policies have a higher percentage score and a darker colour.

Weaker policies have a lighter colour and a lower percentage score.



Table 1: An overview of policies and benchmarking scores.

Policy Area		NL	NO	PL	PT	UK
	Front of pack labelling	69%	62%	54%	62%	69%
	Fruit and vegetable initiatives in schools	80%	40%	70%	70%	80%
	Restricting food and drink advertising	33%	50%	70%	27%	47%
	Programmes promoting physical activity	33%	63%	78%	50%	50%
	Physical activity education, assessment and counselling	27%	33%	67%	45%	60%
	Physical activity guidelines	33%	10%	11%	11%	67%

LIMITATIONS

This briefing has presented the first comparison of policies implemented in European countries using the NOURISHING and MOVING frameworks. However, the research does have some limitations.

One limitation is that this brief's findings are drawn from a small snapshot of policies, analysed by a preliminary version of World Cancer Research Fund International's benchmarking tool. Also, the brief does not provide a comprehensive overview or analysis of all implemented policies within a country related to diet and physical activity and so the recommendations will be limited, not reflective of the whole policy landscape within a country and subject to modification over time as more policies are implemented. An additional limitation is that the benchmarking coding schema has been finalised for the purposes of this briefing, however may change going forward.

This brief was accurate at the time of writing, however updates to the broader policy landscape may not be reflected in this brief.

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, CO-CREATE 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.

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ABOUT WCRF

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

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