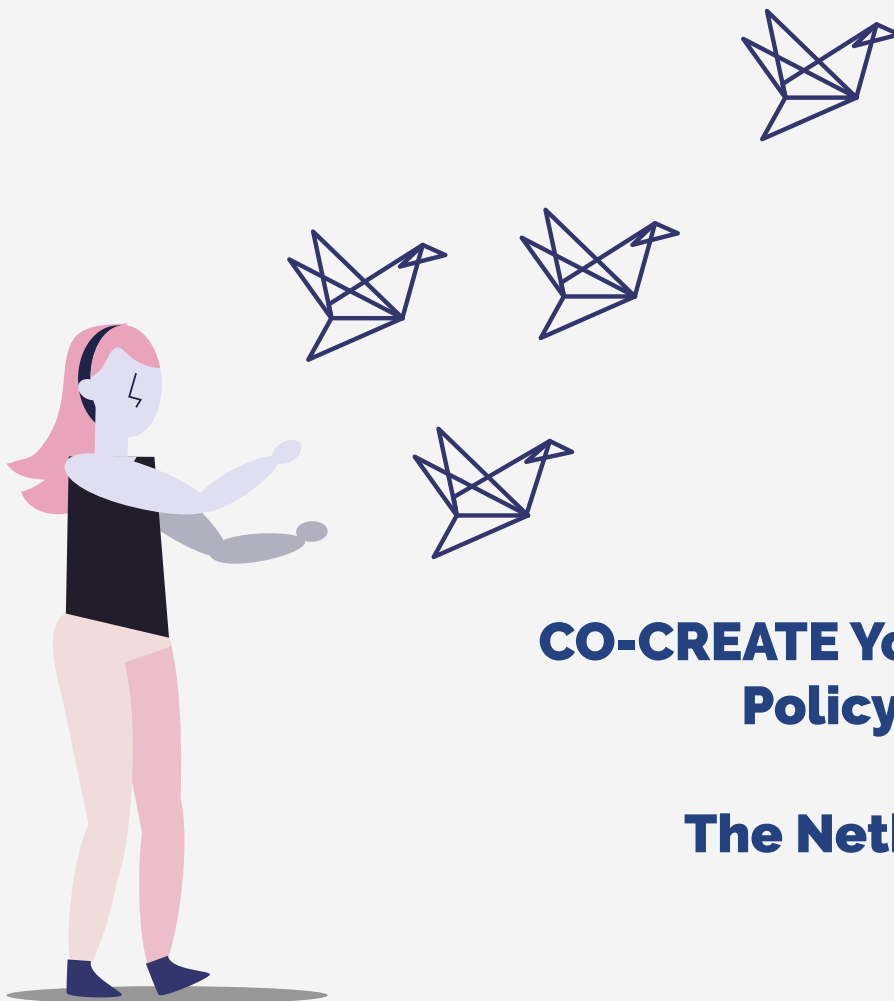
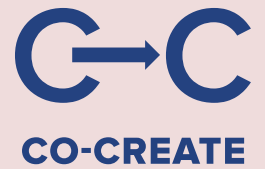


October 2020



CO-CREATE Youth Alliances' Policy Briefs

The Netherlands



Introduction

CO-CREATE tackles the current gaps in obesity research by focusing on adolescents, their perspectives and the factors that influence their health. The project is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and led by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health. It brings together 14 international research and advocacy organisations to work with young people to create, inform and promote policies for obesity prevention. CO-CREATE provides young people with the policy tools, knowledge and infrastructure they need to make the healthiest choices.



By working together in groups, known as alliances, young people participating in the CO-CREATE project have developed policy ideas to address the systemic factors which influence adolescent obesity and health in their respective countries. This brief summarises the policy ideas of CO-CREATE alliances in the Netherlands and outlines the steps they took to finalise their proposals. This brief aims to inform relevant stakeholders, such as policy- and decision-makers, about policies relevant for adolescents to tackle excess weight and obesity and to introduce a model on how to actively involve young people in the development of policies.

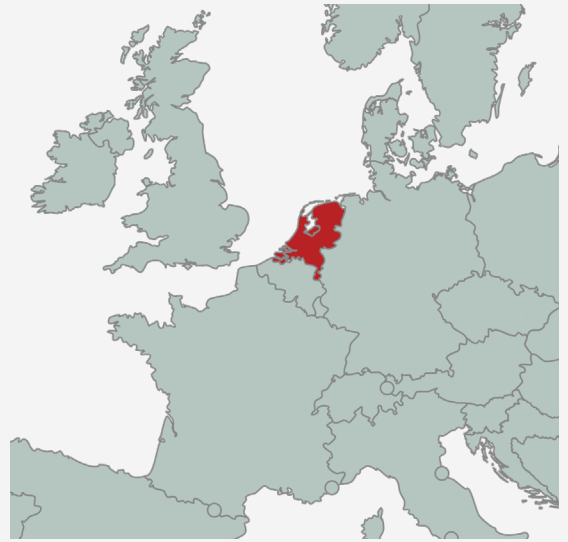
Youth participation and co-creation

Young people are still rarely involved in addressing issues that are directly relevant to their lives. Co-creation with adolescents through participatory action research has proved to be an effective tool for young people to tackle inequalities on various social issues, in particular those which directly affect them, such as health, and to successfully promote civic and political engagement among young people .

Netherlands

Summary of childhood obesity levels in the Netherlands

In 2016, nearly 10% of young people under the age of 17 in the Netherlands were overweight. This figure doubled among those who were between 18-24 years of age; based on their Body Mass Index (BMI) around 20% were moderately overweight and a further 3% were severely overweight (obese). The prevalence of overweight was particularly prominent among those with an immigrant background; one in four young people under the age of 24 was categorised as being overweight or obese.¹ Given this situation, preventing overweight and obesity among young people in the Netherlands is one of the government's top priorities,² which has been embedded in the National Prevention Agreement.³



Childhood obesity level of the areas where the alliances were established

The Dutch alliances were set up in Amsterdam, the Dutch capital with 821,000 inhabitants, and Almere, a smaller city with 197,000 inhabitants situated 30km from Amsterdam. From 2012 to 2015, the percentage of children affected by obesity in Amsterdam declined from 21% to 18.5%.⁴ However, obesity continues to be an issue for local authorities, and is being addressed through an area-based health strategy (AAGG, Amsterdamse Aanpak Gezond Gewicht). Despite the overall decline, the prevalence of obesity among young people in Amsterdam is notably higher among young people with a migrant background (Franssen and Jansen 2015). Additionally, young people with a lower socioeconomic status (SES) still seem to be more affected by the challenges of healthy living than young people with a higher SES.

In Almere, 15% of children and 4% of young people are considered overweight or obese. The total (19%) is higher than the Dutch average of 12%. For this reason, the municipality launched a local health initiative, 'Aanpak Gezond Gewicht Almere' (AGGA)/'Gezonde Jeugd', to coordinate all efforts geared towards improving the health of young people. One of the most relevant initiatives is the Floriade Expo,⁵ a major international event to be held in Almere in 2022. The overarching theme of this event is Growing green cities, with the sub-themes Food, Health and Energy. The Floriade Expo is therefore providing a framework for the city to actively seek and promote youth participation in order to create a sustainable city and sustainable food systems through citizen engagement.

METHODOLOGY

1. Based on Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR), young people in CO-CREATE alliances were empowered to develop policy ideas to address the systemic issue of adolescent excess weight and obesity.
2. Supported by trained CO-CREATE country staff and assisted by co-facilitators from youth organisations, young people received information and training to help them develop and refine their policy proposals.
3. Using their newly acquired skills and knowledge, they held discussions, did research and worked with relevant stakeholders to finalise their ideas.
4. They met regularly over the course of several months, both in person and online.
5. Policy ideas were often reviewed and revised based on information gathered by alliance members after conducting their PAR activities.
6. The young people also participated in dialogue forums with relevant stakeholders; here, alliance members met with policy-makers and business leaders to discuss their policy ideas and translate them into possible action, follow-up measures or practical steps. Policy ideas were often then refined based on the knowledge gained at these forums.
7. The finalisation of the brief included a feedback round with some of the alliance members as well as input from the CO-CREATE task force; a small group consisting of representatives from alliances in different CO-CREATE implementing countries.



CO-CREATE Almere Alliance's Policy Idea

Kitchen take-over; warm, healthy food in school canteens – made by the young people themselves



- Enrich the school canteen with warm, healthy and tasty food, prepared by the young people themselves.
- Share and provide recipes made and tested by young people, which can then be added to the school canteen's menu.
- Raise awareness at the Netherlands Nutrition Centre (Voedingscentrum) that not everyone likes or considers cheese sandwiches to be healthy.



Summary of the policy

This policy idea aims to provide healthy and warm food in healthy school canteens by incorporating students' knowledge of and preferences for healthy food based on their different backgrounds and dietary habits at home. The Almere Youth Alliance also wants to produce a cookbook that other school canteens can use in order to rollout their idea to other schools. They also intend to teach young people how to cook.

The problem

The young people do not consider the food served in school canteens to be healthy or tasty; they prefer to eat tastier food, even if it is unhealthy. This is partly because the food provided only caters to certain preferences. The young people in this group, who come from different cultural backgrounds and have different eating habits, do not find cold cheese sandwiches appetising. Their knowledge of and preferences for different types of warm and fresh food, vegetables, herbs and particular recipes is currently ignored and not reflected in the range of food available in the school canteen. As a result, not only do they choose not to eat what the school considers 'healthy', they also feel left out and unheard.

Activities youth undertook to develop the policy idea

1. During the system mapping activity, the group identified various factors in their immediate environment that contribute towards adolescent obesity.
2. After further discussions, the group came up with policy ideas to address these factors. One group decided to focus on providing better and healthier varieties of food in the school canteen.
3. This group took a more active approach to further develop this policy; the school gave them permission to cook healthier food for the canteen.
4. They collected information about the requirements of the own school canteen, in relation to the 'healthy canteen' platform.
5. They participated in debating exercises to think more critically about their policy ideas.
6. They drew up surveys to find out what their peers would like to see as part of a healthy school canteen.
7. The group came up with recipes and discussed them with the teacher responsible for the 'healthy canteen' guidelines.
8. For several weeks they cooked in the school canteen and sold the food to their fellow students.
9. They organised and participated in an online meeting with the regional manager of the Netherlands Nutrition Centre's Healthy Canteen initiative and a policymaker. Action points (in-depth study of the Healthy Canteen guidelines; adapting recipes; joining the Healthy Canteen student participation initiative to implement their idea) will be addressed in the autumn of 2020. The group also engaged with a TV chef who has published a cookbook.
10. By drawing on all these activities and experiences, they were able to refine their original idea and finalise their policy proposal.

CO-CREATE Almere Alliance's Policy Idea

Sugar tax; making unhealthy food more expensive and healthy food cheaper



- Introduce a sugar tax (a fee per gram of sugar) in the Netherlands to raise awareness and stimulate the debate about sugar in products.
- Persuade the industry to decrease the amount of sugar in their products and supermarkets to promote healthy products.
- Make it easier and more attractive for young consumers to buy healthy products.



Summary of the policy

The young people in this group want to introduce a sugar tax (a fee per gram of sugar) on sugary drinks in the Netherlands, and they want to stimulate further debate and raise awareness about sugar in products and the role of food prices. They want to combine this tax with other measures, such as information about healthy food and exercise. They also claim that discounts in supermarkets should be applied to healthy foods and drinks and that these products should be placed in prominent places in supermarket.

The problem

Unhealthy food is often cheap and more accessible, while healthy food is often more expensive and less attractive. This is a problem because people with financial constraints find it difficult to live a healthy lifestyle, which is costly, and young people in particular are also more likely to buy unhealthy food containing high levels of sugar in supermarkets due to its attractiveness and low cost. A sugar tax has been introduced in many countries, but this is not the case in the Netherlands.

Activities youth undertook to develop the policy idea

1. During the system mapping activity, the group identified various factors in their immediate environment that contribute towards adolescent obesity.
2. After further discussions the group came up with policy ideas to address these factors. One group decided to focus on influencing the prices of healthy and unhealthy food.
3. They participated in debating exercises in order to think more critically about their policy ideas.
4. The group studied research about food prices and sugar tax in different countries.
5. They interviewed a researcher on effective policies and obstacles to the introduction of a sugar tax.
6. They then looked at the different parties involved and assessed the pros and cons of introducing a sugar tax in the Netherlands based on a statement issued by Dutch policymakers.
7. They drew up, distributed and analysed a survey⁶ to investigate consumers' behaviour in supermarkets and attitudes towards tax and prices.
8. The young people organised a dialogue forum with a manager from a soft drinks company, an alderman and a policy officer in the field of healthy weight (the JOGG initiative⁷). The participants discussed the importance of the idea, opportunities and obstacles, a shared vision and next steps.
9. By drawing on all these activities and experiences, the group was able to refine its original idea and finalise the policy proposal.

CO-CREATE Amsterdam Alliance's Policy Idea

Recycle bins at schools that make it more fun and easier to throw away and separate waste

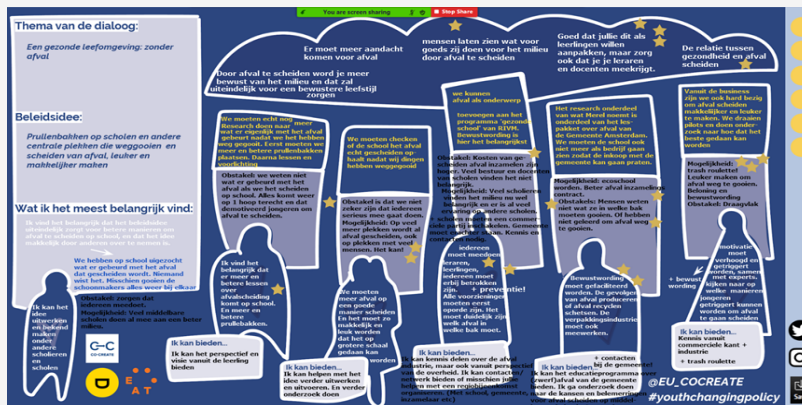


- Reduce waste in and around schools.
- Separate waste (into plastic, paper, other) as much as possible using newly developed recycling bins.
- Create awareness among young people about waste and a healthy environment



Summary of the policy

This policy idea aims to create a recycling bin that makes separating and disposing of waste easier and more fun for young people. When they dispose of waste packaging from healthy food, the bin then gives them a reward. The bins can be placed in different locations, including schools, offices and train stations.



The problem

The young people in this group primarily focused on achieving a healthy living environment –with no litter in public spaces. They have noticed that there is a lot of litter and that waste is often not separated. This is a problem because separating and processing waste contributes towards a cleaner living environment for everyone and improves the surrounding. The young people in this group linked waste to healthy food, since unhealthy food often comes with a lot of packaging and plastic. If young people are more conscious about throwing away and separating their waste, they are more likely to also eat healthier because they will notice that an apple has no packaging and therefore creates less waste. The group wants to target this idea towards young people at secondary school, because 'they are the future'.

The image above shows the output from an online dialogue forum in which the Amsterdam alliance took part

Activities youth undertook to develop the policy idea

1. During the system mapping activity, the group identified various factors in their immediate environment that contribute towards adolescent obesity.
2. After further discussions among themselves they came up with a number of policy ideas to address these factors. One group decided to focus on waste and a sustainable environment.
3. As a reference project, the group looked at 'Trash Roulette'; a rubbish bin that registers how much waste is thrown away and sometimes gives away a little prize.
4. They drew up, distributed and analysed a survey (34 responses) conducted among fellow students at their school to find out about their experiences with, attitudes towards and behaviour regarding separating waste.
5. The young people organised a dialogue forum and discussed their idea with a representative from the national government, a policymaker from the City of Amsterdam who focuses on waste separation and a manager from a cleaning and waste management company, GOM, who develops rubbish bins in Amsterdam.
6. By drawing on all these activities and experiences, the group was able to refine its original idea and finalise the policy proposal.

CO-CREATE Amsterdam Alliance's Policy Idea

Cooking classes for young people in schools and online

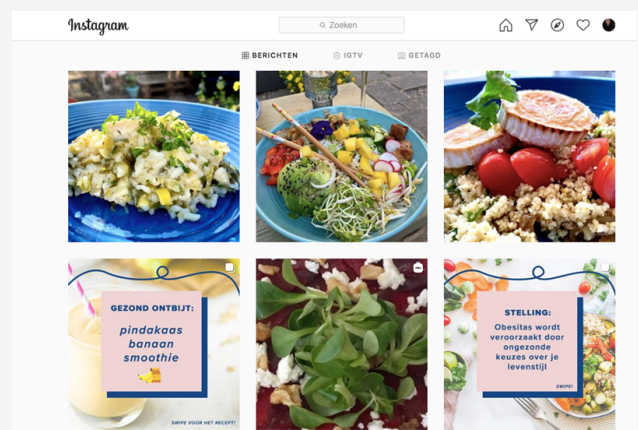


- Organising cooking lessons at schools to teach youngsters how to prepare food, learn about the origin of products, and what food is healthy
- Creating online platforms using social media to learn and inspire young people to cook healthy recipes



Summary of the policy

The young people in this group claim that there should be cooking classes at school and an expansion of canteens. They think that youngsters should learn how to prepare healthy food, about the origin of products and when food is healthy. Due to COVID-19 regulations, cooking lessons should also be posted online or on Instagram, to inspire young people.



The problem

The young people in this group focused on unhealthy behaviour that many young people have developed over the years. When you eat unhealthy over a long period of time, it is difficult to change this, especially when information and education is lacking.

The image above shows the Instagram account that was established by the Amsterdam alliance

Activities youth undertook to develop the policy idea

1. Through following and doing system mapping training and exercise, young people identified different factors that contribute to the challenge of adolescents' obesity in their immediate environment.
2. Further discussion among themselves resulted in some policy ideas to address these factors. One group decided to focus on cooking lessons.
3. They attended cooking classes at another secondary school to gather inspirations on how to further develop their policy idea.
4. They then developed an Instagram page, made cooking videos, and shared recipes on Instagram.
5. The young people also prepared a dialogue forum to discuss their idea with a caterer, a teacher of cooking lessons at another secondary school, and an influencer focused on food. They are exploring whether they are able to have a forum in the fall of 2020.
6. Informed by the overall experience, young people refined their original idea and finalised their policy proposal.

CO-CREATE Almere Alliance

Young people exercise for free in the gym, swimming pool and around their own neighbourhood



- Encourage sport clubs and swimming pools, supported by the municipality, to offer young people the opportunity to exercise for free twice a week.
- Provide sports equipment to young people which they can use to exercise at home or in their neighbourhood



Summary of the policy

The group wants to offer all young people (aged 16 and over) who are facing financial difficulties the opportunity to exercise twice a week for free at a gym or a swimming pool. In light of the measures that have been introduced to tackle COVID-19, the policy also aims to provide young people with sports equipment at home so that they can exercise in their own home and neighbourhood

The problem

The young people in the group witness stress, drug use and laziness among their peers due to spending time playing games, watching TV and on social media. However, sport is often expensive and not all young people enjoy it. It is therefore important that young people exercise more, that they have options to do so and that money is not an obstacle. If it is free to play sports and do exercise, physical activity can play a bigger role in young people's lives.

The Dutch Youth Sports Fund mainly focuses on team sports and sports clubs. During the lockdown due to COVID-19, the young people in this group discovered interesting information about the wishes and constraints of young people to play sport and exercise at home or in their neighbourhood. This project shows that it is possible to encourage young people to engage in other forms of sport and exercise by providing financial support or sports equipment.

Activities youth undertook to develop the policy idea

1. During the system mapping activity, the group identified various factors in their immediate environment that contribute towards adolescent obesity.
2. After further discussions among themselves they came up with a number of policy ideas to address these factors. This group decided to focus on the accessibility of sports and physical activity.
3. The group organised an initiative whereby they asked their peers in Almere what kind of equipment would help them to start exercising at home or in their neighbourhood. They received orders from 22 young people (18 girls, three boys) for eight footballs, four basketballs, three yoga balls, two gym mats, one sports kit, one water bottle and three work-out sets.
4. They then applied for a budget and ordered the sports equipment, which was then delivered to the young people's homes.
5. They drew up and conducted a survey to find out how the equipment was used and whether the respondents thought young people would take up sport and exercise if they had access and the necessary equipment.
6. By drawing on all these activities and experiences, the group was able to refine its original idea and finalise the policy proposal.

Follow-up

Three of the ideas described in this policy brief have been further developed and discussed with stakeholders during online meetings; two during dialogue forums, and one during a more informal Microsoft Teams meeting.

The group wanting to introduce a sugar tax in the Netherlands organised a dialogue forum with a manager from a soft drinks company, an alderman from Almere and a programme manager/policy officer in the field of healthy weight. During this forum the participants discussed the importance of the idea, the opportunities and obstacles, a shared vision and next steps. The participants committed to providing further information about tax and prices, to sharing the idea at a national level and to engaging in talks with local supermarkets. The young people in this group are also members of the international CO-CREATE Youth Task Force, which is preparing a Youth Statement. Here, too, the young people are developing their ideas and plans regarding the prices of food and a sugar tax per amount of sugar, and they are preparing for upcoming dialogue forums with various stakeholders.

The group aiming to combine a more sustainable environment with less waste for young people and the promotion of healthy food organised a dialogue forum with a representative from the national government, a policymaker from the City of Amsterdam engaged in waste separation and a manager from the cleaning and waste management company, GOM, who develops rubbish bins in Amsterdam. The following action ideas emerged from the dialogue forum: share the idea with other schools, provide help to research and implement the policy idea, share knowledge about the environment, the waste system and the Healthy School programme, share contacts and put the young people in touch with other stakeholders, and organise a regional meeting so that the young people can bring together the council, the school and the cleaning and waste management industry. The next steps, and the availability of the young people to continue their engagement, are currently explored.

The group pushing for greater youth involvement in creating recipes and cooking food for the school canteen organised an online meeting with the regional manager from the Netherlands Nutrition Centre's Healthy School Canteen programme and a policy officer from the City of Amsterdam. During the meeting, the group presented their idea and their project, received feedback and exchanged ideas with the attendees on how to proceed. Follow-up steps include potential collaboration with Healthy Canteen programme and with other schools in Amsterdam. A follow-up meeting to continue this process is currently being arranged.

On balance, the young people participating in the Dutch alliances have come up with ideas on a systemic level that complement and go further than existing policies, such as the 'Kies ik Gezond?' app (which helps people choose healthy food options), balancedagen (days on which you balance your calorie intake by focusing on the food you eat, which generally after days on which you eat more than usual) and providing fruit for schools. Moreover, they have taken steps to present some of their ideas to stakeholders (policymakers and industry players in particular). Activities to further develop and implement these ideas are ongoing.

Resources

The policy ideas developed by the Youth Alliances engage with, build upon and are in line with existing policies regarding health and obesity in the Netherlands. Several relevant policies are listed below.

1. The 'Kies Ik Gezond?' app (2018)⁸
2. The EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme (2017)⁹
3. Balansdag (Balance Day) (2006)¹⁰

Acknowledgements

This brief was written by Gerlieke Veltkamp, Marloes van Houten, Milio van de Kamp, Sherria Ayuandini, Branca van Os, Kevin Verster, Lisa Kenter, Claudia Wolberts, Bianca Baan, Almere Youth Alliance members and Amsterdam Youth Alliance members. This brief was designed by Margot Neveux (World Obesity Federation).

With special thanks to PRO Almere, Montessori Lyceum Amsterdam, Aeres HBO Almere, Aeres MBO Almere, De Schoor, JOGG (Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht), AAGG (Amsterdamse Aanpak Gezond Gewicht)/GGD (municipal health service), AGGA (Aanpak Gezond Gewicht Almere), the Municipality of Almere and the City of Amsterdam for their collaboration, which allowed us to complete this project together with the participating young people.

Contact details

For enquiries related to this policy brief, please contact Christian Bröer at c.broer@uva.nl.

University of Amsterdam, Department of Sociology
Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, Room B606
PO Box 15508, 1001 NA Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tel.: +31 (0) 65 540 9436

References

1. <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2019/15/one-quarter-of-young-adults-are-overweight>
2. <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-019-7304-1>
3. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/gezondheid-en-preventie/documenten/rapporten/2018/02/06/preventie-houdt-je-gezonder>
4. Volkskrant, Het Parool
5. <https://floriade.almere.nl/growing-green-cities/>
6. The survey was developed and distributed (via Instagram, Facebook and direct link) by the young people; N=64; Age 15 years old or younger: n=7; age 16-25 years old: n=12; age 25-50 years old n=22; age 50 years old or older: n=23
7. <https://jongerenopgezondgewicht.nl/>
8. <https://www.voedingscentrum.nl/nl.aspx>
9. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/eu-school-fruit-vegetables-and-milk-scheme-2019-mar-27_en
10. <https://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-database>; <https://gezondeschoolkantine.voedingscentrum.nl/nl.aspx>