

Best-ReMaP Policy Recommendations

Preamble

While the main objective of the European Union's (EU) Joint Action Best-ReMaP is to contribute to the improvement of health outcomes of children and adolescents by improving food choices in the environments where they live, learn, play and consume;

While simultaneously recognising that the main mechanism for improving food choices is by changing obesogenic environments and ensuring that the food choices that children and adolescents make are also the healthiest ones by default;

Recognising the child rights-based approach towards EU and national food and nutrition policies;

Aware of and committed to reducing inequalities in health, nutrition and food policies/outcomes between and within European states, as well as aspiring toward a wellbeing economy as a general principle guiding NCDs prevention policies;

While implementing strategic priorities of the 3rd EU Health Programme (2014-2020), main funding instrument for the implementation of the EU Joint Action Best-ReMaP;

Highlighting the fact that in the last decade, several rotating Presidencies of the Council of the EU prioritised and taken actions in food, nutrition, physical activity, and childhood obesity prevention through their Conclusions and Recommendations. This includes the Greek Presidency's Council Conclusions 2014¹ on nutrition and physical activity to endorse and implementing commitments of the EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity (2014-2020), the 2016 Dutch Presidency's Council Roadmap for Action on Food Product Improvement (food Reformulation)², the Maltese 2017 Presidency's Council Conclusions on contribution towards halting the rise in Childhood Overweight and Obesity³, including Public Food Procurements, as well as the Austrian Presidency's 2018 Food Systems dialogs in the EU⁴. EU High-level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity adopted the first EU Framework for Salt Reduction and Food Reformulation in 2008, expanded on other nutrients since;

Supporting the EU4Health Programme's (2021-2027) strategic priorities, and linking to a number of commitments included in the context of the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, the EU NCDs Healthier Together initiative, as well as the Farm to Fork strategy as a component of an EU-wide Green Deal;

While the main areas of action of the EU Joint Action Best-ReMaP concerned (1) the monitoring and analysis of how the food that people consume changes at the European and national level;

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX%3A52014XG0708%2801%29&rid=14>

² https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2017-10/2016eunlpresidency_roadmap_en_0.pdf

³ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG0629\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG0629(01))

⁴ https://foodsystemsdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FSD_181123_Vienna_Summary-report_UPLOADED190311.pdf

(2) the regulations on the marketing of food to children; (3) the procurement of food by public bodies for educational institutions, social care facilities where children gather;

The following policy recommendations are **addressed** to the EU's Institutions (European Commission, European Parliament and the EU Councils of Ministers) and National Governments and Ministries (health, agriculture, education, consumer, family and social affairs, economy), and regional development and local authorities. They are asked to act in line with their mandates, based on the public health-driven agendas to decrease the level of obesogenity linked to both traditional/linear as well as digital (food) environments where children live, learn, play, and consume;

Furthermore, other relevant stakeholders (civil society e.g. consumer organisations, private sectors - primary producers, food processors and retailers, academia and media), along with public health non-profit organisations, health professionals, and the public should work together to create a healthier environment for children. **Informing and sharing** the recommendations with stakeholders will empower them to act on the elaborated policies in line with their accountability and capacity within their core businesses.

Based on the JA Best-ReMaP outcomes, general recommendations to EU institutions (EC, EP, the Council of Ministers) MS and local authorities are as follows, that they:

- **Acknowledge the importance of the JA Best-ReMaP recommendations**, produced by 24 Member States (MS) and accession countries, **and act in line with the proposed course of action** highlighting the implementation potential of the three frameworks for action in the areas of food reformulation, food marketing restrictions and public procurement of foods;
- **Urgently act and regulate and/or legislate on strategic approaches** to strengthen the resilience of health-promoting and sustainable food systems, via existing platforms and advisory groups, as well as established governance mechanisms at EU level;
- **Establish governmental intersectoral bodies** at all relevant levels based on the public health-driven agendas, to discuss and identify areas for intersectoral implementation, while developing common agendas with other public sectors, especially the environmental one. The necessary implementation resources should be provided within the sectors to support the whole policy process together with monitoring and evaluation, and to share accountability for the successful implementation of the actions.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The EU Joint Action Best-ReMaP consortium partners, representing Competent Authorities of the Member States call on the European Commission (EC) to:

In reference to all three policies' concerned

1. **Review current EU and domestic legislation and the landscape** on nutrition, physical activity and obesity policies, identifying areas that warrant improvements to be included to the new EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity 2024-2035.
2. **Develop methods for health equity impact analysis** that regulators can use to assess the potential effects of all policies and interventions on diet-related health, while further **fostering the efforts to embed the food system policies into the ongoing wellbeing economy** policy developments;
3. **Consider and actively pursue options for key health and sustainability of the food systems indicators in the European Semester** process of monitoring socio-economic policy coordination, helping to contribute to its continuous improvement, steering reforms and investments in European states and regions;
4. **Step up efforts to build platforms and tools that facilitate knowledge exchange**, information and best practices among MSs and call on the EC to re-establish governance mechanism for networking and sharing implementation experiences among MSs in the areas of healthy nutrition, physical activity and prevention of obesity, such as the ex-High-Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity;
5. **Support and secure the use of developed guidelines and tools** (as FABLE database) and continue to develop and implement missing common guidelines and tools, such as the public food procurement tool, to ensure that all countries monitor the data on the implementation of policies in the same way and that they implement the policies in the more aligned way as in the case of public food procurements;
6. **Ensure the sustainability and usability of the FABLE database in the long term and create a technical cooperation structure and all necessary capacities**, including founding resources, to support countries in following guidelines, coordinate the database's implementation, and also enable the exchange of experiences when using the database to evaluate different nutrition policies;
7. **Support the development of innovative, reliable, and validated technological tools to effectively monitor children's exposure to digital marketing** and to automate and decrease manual workload in some aspects of monitoring and in collecting food products nutritional information.

In particular concerning the following policy areas:

8. Processed Food Monitoring and Reformulation (Work Package 5)

- Start discussions with MS to identify levers to ensure that the FABLE database will be fed regularly by all of them;
- Encourage, facilitate and support MS to establish conditions and capacities for alignment of the reformulation monitoring procedures;

9. Reducing the marketing of unhealthy foods to children (Work Package 6)

- Develop and prioritise mandatory regulatory approaches over self-regulatory and co-regulatory approaches in order to urgently and effectively reduce children's exposure to the marketing of unhealthy foods. These approaches should be based on a comprehensive child rights-based approach, adopting a broad definition of the core notions of 'marketing' and 'marketing to children', including all children below 18 years of age. Should also cover a wide set of marketing techniques and media and going above and beyond the provisions of the EU Audio-Visual Media Services Directive (food advertisements in traditional media, food packaging, the use of equity brand characters, sponsorships, advergames, and digital media);
- Encourage, facilitate and support MS to establish conditions and capacities for alignment of the reducing of the linear/traditional and digital food marketing to children monitoring procedures;

10. Food Procurement in Public Institutions Public procurement of food and catering services (PFP-CS⁵) in public institutions (Work Package 7)

- Ensure sufficient funding resources and set minimum mandatory criteria for Public Food Procurement that includes health, reference to national dietary guidelines, sustainability, environmental impact, local circumstances, equity, and other relevant criteria;
- Nominate the network of the National Focal Points on Public Food Procurement to foster MSs' expertise in the public procurement process at the EU level, by facilitating the sharing of knowledge, tools, and technical assistance;

⁵ Public food procurement and catering services – for the purpose of this document PFP – public food procurement will be used for the public procurement of food and catering services (PFP-CS)

MEMBER STATES

The EU Joint Action Best-ReMaP consortium partners call on the Member States (MS) to:

In particular concerning the following policy areas:

Processed Food Monitoring and Reformulation (Work Package 5)

Food reformulation is defined as the process of altering a food or beverage product's recipe or composition with the objective of making it healthier. The WP5 developed and implemented a standardised European monitoring system to monitor food offerings and nutritional content, as well as to identify the best formulation and room for reformulation. By finding the basis and the space for reformulation, the producers may be more motivated to reformulate their products into healthier options for processed foods available in EU supermarkets, by reducing salt, sugars and fat content. In addition, reformulation can reduce inequities in nutrition and diet-related ill-health.

Processed food monitoring should identify and prioritise food categories that have a major contribution to children and adolescents' nutrient intake in all concerned countries, but also considering the presence of preexisting data, the interest of the participating countries and possible room for reformulation. Once the first data collection is implemented, it is recommended to repeat the follow-up every 3 to 5 years, a time gap sufficient to observe reformulations.

Member States are requested to:

- Identify and prioritize food categories that have a major contribution to children and adolescents' nutrient intake in their countries;
- Earmark adequate budgets and invest in training of personnel for the monitoring of food reformulation and use of Best-ReMaP classification and align and upgrade their processed foods databases in order to provide data to EU FABLE database in line with the BestReMaP guidelines for reformulations;
- Establish links at the national level with all the stakeholders, including the private sector within the framework of the national programmes of reformulation, whilst ensuring transparency and accountability, simultaneously avoiding a conflict of interest;

Reducing the marketing of unhealthy foods to children (Work Package 6)

Children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing is one of the key elements of the obesogenic environment in which EU children are currently living. It is well documented in the literature that food marketing has a harmful impact on children's food preferences, attitudes and behaviours. It has a negative impact on children's preference for energy-dense, low nutrient-density foods, as well as on children's purchase behaviour and diet-related health, leading to an increase of total energy intake. Children are widely exposed to **harmful food marketing**

through a wide variety of channels, from the most traditional (television, radio, billboards) to the more innovative (digital marketing) and are particularly vulnerable to marketing strategies, which are evolving and emerging more powerful, particularly those associated with the digital context. Reducing children's exposure to harmful food marketing can be expected to reduce inequities in diet-related health.

Member States are requested to:

- Promote cooperation among different stakeholders, by establishing stakeholders and inter-sectoral working groups on reducing food marketing to children, within the public health-driven agenda;
- Develop and prioritise mandatory regulatory approaches over self-regulatory and co-regulatory approaches to reduce exposure to both the traditional/linear and digital trends of unhealthy food marketing, including food packaging, the use of equity brand characters, sponsorships, advergames, and novel developments in artificial intelligence (AI);
- Adopt and adapt a strict Nutrient Profile Model (NPM), based on the World Health Organization's (WHO) NPM, to the national context and ensure regular monitoring of the use of NPM for reducing marketing pressure to children in traditional and digital media;
- The age restriction for marketing regulations up to 18 years should be strictly enforced and monitored at the national level to ensure that both adolescents as well as younger children are protected by policies;
- Annually inform national parliaments and governments of the findings regarding the traditional/linear and digital marketing of food to children;
- Pay specific attention to children in vulnerable situations, especially in regards to the targeting of digital marketing on them;

Food Procurement in Public Institutions Public procurement of food and catering services (PFP-CS) in public institutions (Work Package 7)

Children spend almost a third of their day in kindergarten or school and consume a large part of their daily energy intake in educational environments. For this reason, the types of environments present important factors in the development of childhood obesity. Higher nutrition standards for food procurement can be expected to provide benefits to health and reduce inequities in diet-related diseases.

PFP influence both food consumption and food production patterns and could change the food environment for children in public institutions. Intersectoral collaboration is needed for successful implementation of PFP and governance mechanisms supporting networking among PFP officers and focal points are essential for aligned implementation of PFP processes in

MS. To initiate a successful Public Food Procurement (PFP) process, it is necessary to undertake an examination of both the legislation and the landscape pertaining to PFP.

Member States are requested to:

- Establish stakeholders and inter-sectoral public procurement working groups;
- Ensure governmental intersectoral collaboration, provide necessary capacities, including human capacities and relevant tools, and sufficient funding resources;
- Consider implementation of minimum mandatory criteria for PFP to cover health, reference to national dietary guidelines, sustainability, environmental impact, local circumstances, equity, etc. Enforcing the application of criteria would be most efficient and straightforward through well-established governance structures;
- Encourage the establishment or upgrade of the EU PFP officers network to foster the expertise among PFP officers at the national level;
- Align and simplify the implementation of the existing legislation on PFP;
- Implement the unified PFP tools and provide regular monitoring for PFP procedures in countries;

REGIONAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

The EU Joint Action Best-ReMaP consortium partners call on the Regional and Local Authorities and relevant stakeholders to:

In particular concerning the following policy areas:

Processed Food Monitoring and Reformulation (Work Package 5)

- Consider the use of FABLE database to inform and educate different populations on the quality of processed foods they consume;

Reducing the marketing of unhealthy foods to children (Work Package 6)

- Empower parents, legal guardians and other caregivers to protect children, recognising youth as important stakeholders. This should include interventions that increase literacy for all stakeholders explaining how traditional and digital food marketing functions, why and how it exploits children and why children deserve the right to grow up in a healthy and safe environment;

Food Procurement in Public Institutions Public procurement of food and catering services (PFP-CS) in public institutions (Work Package 7)

- Develop co-participatory processes with regional, local communities of practice, parents, caregivers, children and young people (through workshops, lectures in schools, etc.);
- Consider and use PFP as the driver of the local food, health and social economy, innovation, and co-production in line with the principles of wellbeing economy approach.

Figure 3: WP5 Framework For Action

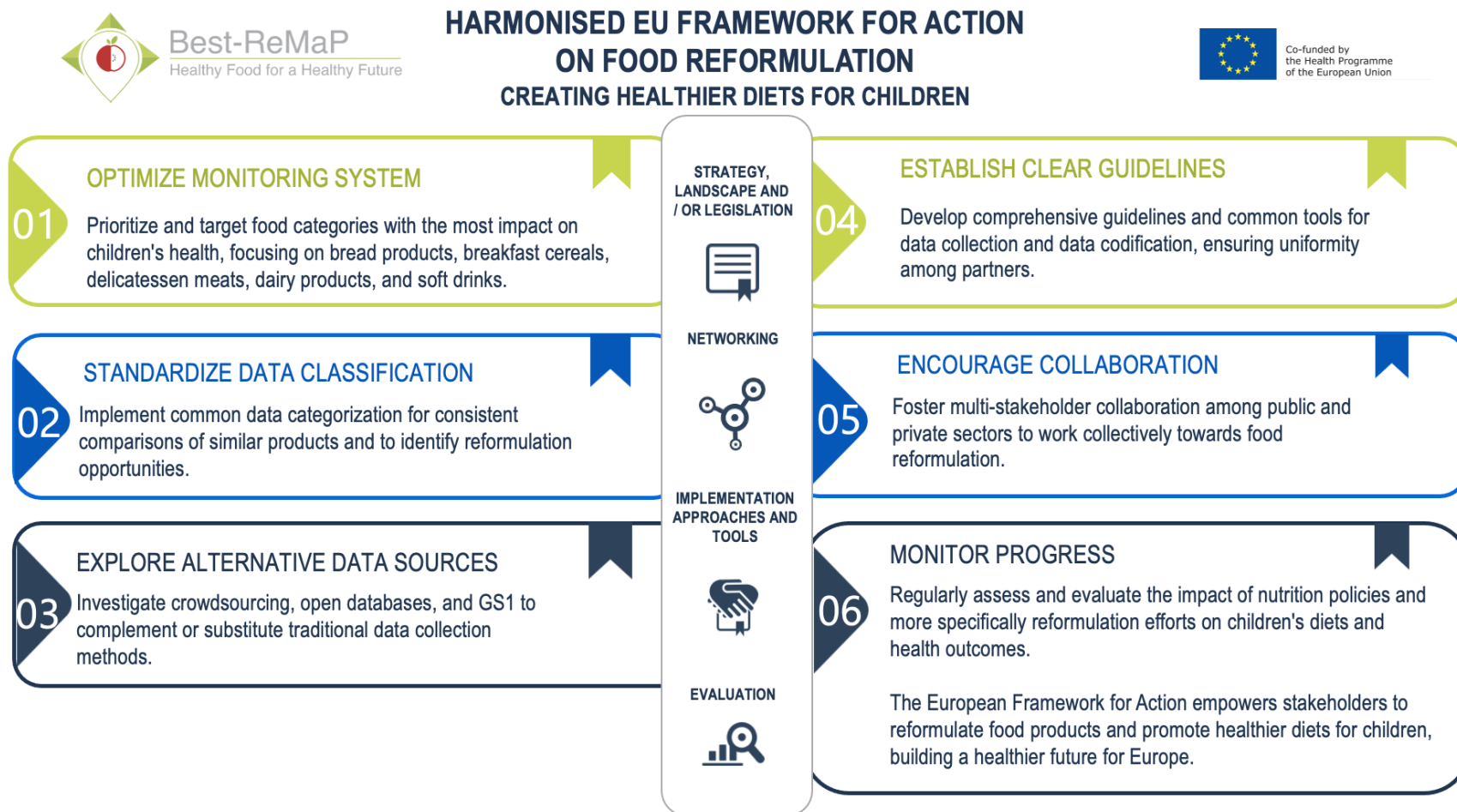


Figure 4: WP6 Framework For Action

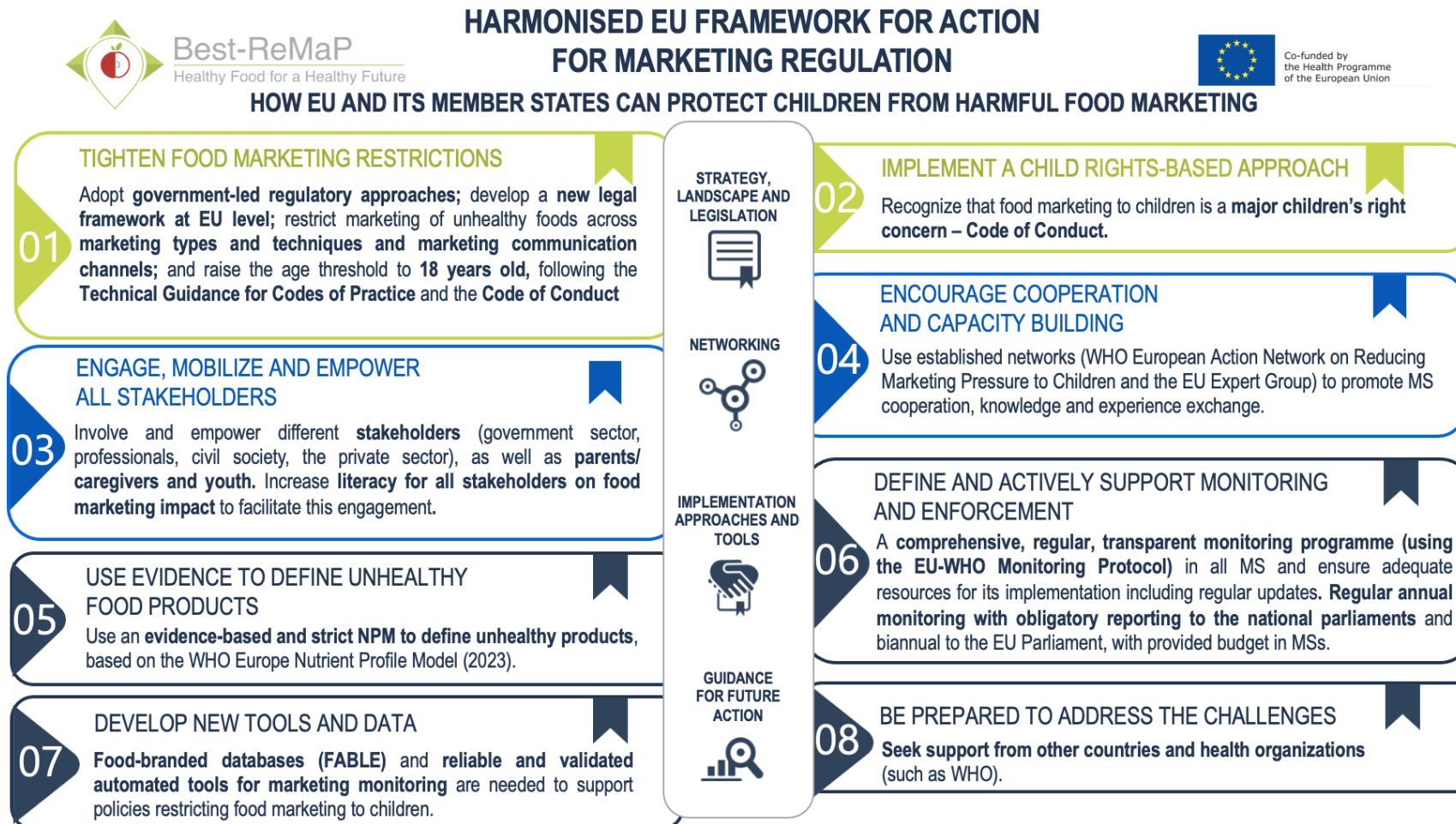


Figure 5: WP7 Framework For Action



HARMONISED EU FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION FOR PUBLIC FOOD PROCUREMENT

