**Switching Mediterranean Consumers to Mediterranean Sustainable Healthy Dietary Patterns**

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*Table 1: History of changes*


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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

| ABBREVIATION / ACRONYM | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| **MD** | Mediterranean Diet |
| **PRIMA** | Partnership for research and innovation in the Mediterranean area |
| **WP** | Work Package |
| **PGI** | Policy Guidelines and Instruments |
| **PO** | Permanent Observatory |
| **PB** | Policy Brief |
| **PD** | Policy Document |

*Table 2: Abbreviation and Acronyms*


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## Executive summary

This document outlines the "**Policy Mix**" for promoting the Mediterranean Diet in Mediterranean countries, developed by the consortium members of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY project and thoroughly analysed by the project's Permanent Observatory.

It includes eight policy instruments: a white paper examining best practices for promoting the Mediterranean Diet, evaluated by SWITCHtoHEALTHY partners, and seven policy briefs outlining incentive-based strategies to enhance adherence to the Mediterranean diet.

Overall, this document serves as a valuable tool, compiling strategies, experiences, and recommendations based on the consortium's expertise and the results of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY project. It represents a significant international effort to promote the Mediterranean Diet effectively.


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# 1. Introduction

This document serves as a comprehensive policy framework aimed at strengthening the promotion of the Mediterranean Diet (MD) through science-based policymaking and evidence-driven strategies. Developed by the consortium members of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY project, it is grounded in research findings, interventions, and assessments conducted throughout the project—particularly from WP1 data, WP4 interventions, and WP5 assessment.

A key objective of this paper – that is composed of eight policy documents – is to bridge the gap between scientific research and policy action by providing policymakers with concrete tools and recommendations to enhance adherence to the Mediterranean Diet. It presents a structured "Policy Mix" designed to support and finance initiatives promoting healthier and more sustainable food behaviours. These resources aim to equip local, regional, and national governmental authorities with actionable strategies to address dietary challenges.

Central to this initiative is the establishment of a Permanent Observatory by Regione Campania, which acted as a dynamic knowledge hub. This Observatory functioned as a knowledge exchange platform and as an operational working group, carrying out new research.

By aligning research-driven insights with policy instruments, this document represents a crucial step toward fostering long-term adherence to the Mediterranean Diet. It provides a structured and actionable approach to transforming food behaviours, ensuring that policymakers have the necessary tools to implement effective, evidence-based strategies for a healthier and more sustainable future.

The white paper, titled Promoting the Mediterranean Diet: Successful Strategies and Recommendations, presents various initiatives and case studies from multiple countries. It covers awareness campaigns, such as Spain's "5 a Day" initiative, stakeholder training and community involvement efforts from Egypt's MedDiet Project, and the scientific research and public awareness work of the Mediterranean Diet Foundation in Spain. Other key contributions include educational programmes like Cupula Gustum in Spain, consumer rights and food safety initiatives from Lebanon, and educational tools for Mediterranean Diet promotion developed by Regione Campania in Italy.

Additionally, the policy document "Leveraging the MedDiet Project: A Policy Framework for Promoting the Mediterranean Diet in Egyptian Schools" highlights the challenges posed by dietary shifts towards processed foods and provides a roadmap for policymakers to integrate MD principles into school education. It discusses best practices from the EU-funded MedDiet Project, policy alignment strategies, and the role of digital tools in enhancing dietary education.

The six policy briefs offer further insights into innovative approaches to Mediterranean Diet promotion. They include strategies such as gastronomic tourist routes in Turkey, reward mechanisms and online challenges in Italian schools, sustainability-focused recommendations for school canteens in Spain. Other studies examine family-based interventions, behavioural change mechanisms, and broader incentive-based policies to boost adherence to the MD, based on the expertise directly gained through SWITCHtoHEALTHY project.


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# 2. Policy Document

## 2.1 PD - White Paper. Promoting the Mediterranean Diet: Successful Strategies and Recommendations

### 2.1.1 Introduction

This White Paper examines the ***best practices*** adopted by various countries to promote the Mediterranean Diet and provides recommendations for effective implementation. Experiences from Spain, Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Turkey, and Italy highlight the importance of awareness campaigns, education, community engagement, and practical approaches to encourage the adoption of this healthy and sustainable diet.

The Mediterranean Diet is renowned for its health benefits, reducing the risk of chronic diseases through a high intake of fruits, vegetables, olive oil, whole grains, fish, and nuts. However, globalization and changing dietary habits have been threatening this tradition. Various initiatives in different countries have been carried out in time, and this document analyses the best approaches – based on the experiences of the Permanent Observatory of the Mediterranean Diet (PO) established within the scope of the project SWITCHtoHEALTHY – to effectively promote the Mediterranean Diet.

In the following paragraphs, eleven activities based on the experiences of the partner countries are examined.






*Figure 1: Workshop with Educators and Policy-makers*

### 2.1.2 Awareness Campaigns: the experience of the "5 a Day" Campaign in Spain (EURECAT, Spain)

In Spain, the "5 a Day" campaign promotes eating at least five daily servings of fresh fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy Mediterranean diet.

Key activities include communication, training, promotions, and international collaborations, all emphasizing the benefits of whole, varied, seasonal, and local produce. Educational projects aim to teach children about the importance of eating five servings of fruit daily, understanding the food pyramid, recognizing fresh and seasonal foods, learning about different fruit and vegetable families, and avoiding food waste.

*Recommendation: Implement nationwide campaigns focusing on children, emphasizing the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet and teaching practical ways to incorporate it into daily meals.*


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*Figure 2: 5 a Day Campaign*

### 2.1.3 MedDiet Project: Stakeholder Training and Community Involvement (CEEBA, Egypt)

The MedDiet project, funded by the EU, successfully introduced the concept of the MD in Egypt, involving educators, schools, government officials, and the general public. It focused on training key stakeholders and using high-quality instructional materials. It sought to help schools and local authorities implement nutrition education initiatives by providing them with the necessary tools and skills.

Key Activities:

- Training local authorities and stakeholders on promoting the Mediterranean Diet.
- Developing the Mediterranean Knowledge System for Local Authorities, including guidelines and promotional materials.
- "MedDiet taste" workshops for all audiences, involving tasting and learning about MD foods.
- Cooking courses for homemakers and families to teach the selection and preparation of MD foods.
- Organizing family games and local gatherings to educate communities about the MD benefits.
- Providing hands-on gardening experiences in schools to teach students how to grow and use fresh produce, promoting healthy eating.

*Recommendation: Develop training programmes and community activities to educate stakeholders and the public about the Mediterranean Diet, incorporating hands-on activities like gardening and cooking classes.*

### 2.1.4 Mediterranean Diet foundation: Scientific Research and Public Awareness (CNTA and CREDA, Spain)

Founded in 1996 in Barcelona, FDM (Fundaciòn Dieta Mediterranea) promotes the Mediterranean Diet (MD) and played a key role in its UNESCO recognition (2010). It collaborates with institutions worldwide and is sponsored by the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture and other organizations.
Key Activities:

- Publication of an updated MD Pyramid.
- Dissemination of scientific research through an International Observatory.
- Organization of seminars and workshops to promote food sustainability.

FDM includes stakeholders from government, municipalities, and the food industry. It promotes the MD through research on its health, cultural, and environmental benefits. One key initiative is an open-access database of weekly Mediterranean menus and recipes using seasonal products, though public awareness remains limited.

*Recommendation: Establish a national body to conduct and disseminate research on the Mediterranean Diet and organize regular seminars and workshops to keep the public informed about its benefits and practices. Create easily accessible online resources, such as weekly meal plans and recipes, to help families integrate the Mediterranean Diet into their routines.*


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### 2.1.5 Cupula Gustum: Innovative Educational Programs (DACC, Spain)

Led by the Association Leader de Ponent and supported by DACC and FEADER, Cúpula Gustum educates Primary Education students on the rural world's role in food production. It features:

- The Cúpula Gustum – A 360º inflatable dome showcasing food production.
- Collective Games – Interactive group activities on agriculture.
- Didactic Guide – Classroom and outdoor learning resources.

The project highlights the value of local agriculture, connecting it to landscape, economy, culture, and traditions, helping children understand food origins and sustainability.

*Recommendation: Implement interactive and engaging educational programmes in schools to teach children about the origins of their food and the importance of locally produced agricultural products.*

### 2.1.6 SWITCHtoHEALTHY (S2H) Project Research and Community Engagement (BUU, Turkey)

In Turkey the S2H project can be considered one of the most impactful MD promotion effort in the last 10 years. It focused on:

- Identifying Mediterranean diet ingredients (Task 1.1).
- Investigating societal drivers and barriers (Task 1.2).
- Conducting focus groups (Task 1.3), reaching 50 families to educate them on nutrition, physical activity, and family meals.
- Surveying 201 families on their awareness and predisposition to the diet.
- Developing 9 fruit bars to encourage students to adopt the diet.

The project was promoted nationally and internationally, with dissemination meetings at universities in Serbia, Turkey (İzmir, Tekirdağ), and Latvia, engaging academics, parents, and students to spread awareness and adoption of the Mediterranean Diet.
Two oral presentations were presented on the subjects of Factors Affecting the Adaptation of Turkish Society to the Mediterranean Diet and Examination of Sociodemographic Characteristics, Health Status, Nutritional Habits and Lifestyle Factors of Turkish Society at the 7th International Congress on Agriculture, Environment and Health between May 30 and June 1, 2024.

*Recommendation: Conduct updated research to understand barriers to adopting the Mediterranean Diet and use these insights to develop targeted educational campaigns. Engage families through focus groups and practical interventions, such as healthy snack alternatives.*

### 2.1.7 Chefchaouen's Mediterranean Diet Project and Slow Food Bouregreg Foundation (CNESTEN, Morocco)

Morocco is experiencing a dietary transition away from the Mediterranean Diet due to urbanization, economic development, and globalization. Civil society initiatives aim to preserve traditional culinary heritage and combat unhealthy dietary practices. Key efforts include:

1. Chefchaouen's "Mediterranean Diet" Project: A local initiative promoting traditional dietary practices.
2. Slow Food Bouregreg Foundation: Advocates for good, clean, and fair food production, highlighting Moroccan products like argan oil and saffron.
3. Green Morocco Plan (PMV): A national strategy to boost agriculture's economic role through cooperatives, increased olive tree cultivation, and agricultural reforms.
4. Labelled Local Products: Recognition of high-quality local products like olive oil, fruits, herbs, and animal products.
5. Promotion of Moroccan Olive Oil: Efforts by FAO to promote the health benefits and economic potential of Moroccan olive oil.


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*Recommendation: Develop local initiatives to preserve and promote traditional dietary practices and local products, emphasizing their cultural and environmental significance. Collaborate with organizations advocating for sustainable food production.*

### 2.1.8 Mediterranean Diet Education Programme: Consumer Rights and Food Safety (CONSUMERS LEBANON, Lebanon)

The Mediterranean Diet Education Programme in Lebanon stands out as a best practice for promoting healthy eating due to its comprehensive, community-focused approach. By integrating efforts from chefs, nutritionists, local authorities, and NGOs like Consumers Lebanon, this program not only focuses on education but also empowers local farmers, supports sustainable agriculture, and fosters public engagement.

Lebanon's rich culinary traditions and connection to the Mediterranean Diet offer a unique opportunity to influence dietary habits. The program addresses modern challenges like urbanization and globalization by emphasizing seasonal, locally sourced ingredients and promoting health benefits through various channels such as schools, media campaigns, and community events.

Its collaboration with international organizations and local stakeholders ensures a holistic approach, while research, surveys, and educational materials tailor the program to local needs. The use of partnerships, including collaboration with farmers' markets, ensures sustainable change by promoting local food production. Moreover, the integration of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY EU project allows for sharing international knowledge and best practices to broaden the impact.

This multi-stakeholder model and local adaptation of the Mediterranean Diet ensure the long-term preservation and promotion of Lebanon's dietary heritage, making it a model of success for other nations facing similar challenges.

*Recommendation: Strengthen consumer rights organizations to promote the Mediterranean Diet through food safety initiatives and collaborations with local farmers. Increase public awareness through media campaigns and educational programmes.*





*Figure 3: Physical dissemination in Lebanese Schools*


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### 2.1.9 Tradesmen's Restaurants and Selluka Certificate Project in Izmir: Certification and Recognition Programs (KTB, Izmir)

The tradition of Tradesmen's restaurants and the Selluka Certificate project in Izmir are exemplary practices in promoting local taste, ingredients, and food safety. Tradesmen's restaurants offer authentic Mediterranean cuisine, reflecting the region's culinary heritage, while the Selluka Certificate recognizes businesses for their commitment to quality and gastronomic value. Through evaluation criteria and official recognition, these initiatives create a competitive environment that encourages healthy and sustainable food practices. Additionally, businesses with the Selluka Certificate receive promotion and exposure, benefiting both local and international tourists seeking authentic dining experiences. Overall, these practices contribute to preserving cultural traditions and promoting food safety in Izmir's culinary landscape.

*Recommendation: Implement certification programs to recognize and promote restaurants and businesses that adhere to the principles of the Mediterranean Diet. Use these programs to enhance local and international tourism by highlighting authentic dining experiences.*

### 2.1.10 Promoting the Mediterranean Diet through Digital and Educational Initiatives (REGIONE CAMPANIA, Italy)

Campania Region's General Directorate of Agricultural, Food, and Forestry Policies has successfully promoted the Mediterranean Diet through a TikTok challenge engaging 3,140 students and 460 teachers, generating over 13,000 interactions within the framework of SWITCHtoHEALTHY project.

Additionally, the office is continuing to implement the Food Education and Consumer Awareness Program reaching 30,000 citizens annually through tastings and workshops. The Regional Register of Educational Farms includes 300 local farms, promoting healthy and sustainable eating. Every year Campania Region's General Directorate of Agricultural, Food, and Forestry Policies organizes Open Farms Day, a festival during which families and students can visit farms without fees and take part in educational and informing activities. This initiative is part of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY project and will continue beyond 2025.

Campania Region also implements successfully the "Fruit and Vegetables in Schools" and "Milk in Schools" programs, aiming to encourage the consumption of healthy products among primary school children. Each year, the national programme involves about 1 million students in Italy, with 120,000 in Campania. 94% of the children appreciated the program, and 90% expressed a desire to continue. Additionally, the initiative has led to an increase in fruit and vegetable consumption, with 37.9% of children changing their opinion about milk.

The Region has also implemented additional actions such as educational workshops, farm visits, school gardens, and thematic competitions to raise awareness among young people and families about the importance of a healthy diet.

*Recommendation: Expand digital engagement through platforms like TikTok to reach younger audiences and scale up educational programmes in schools. Support and grow initiatives like Open Farms Day and the Regional Register of Educational Farms to strengthen ties between communities, local agriculture, and the Mediterranean Diet.*

### 2.1.11 Overall promotion of Med Diet (SLOW FOOD TEBOURBA, Tunisia)

The Future Food Institute, in partnership with Franz Martinelli's Gi.&Me. Association and the Slow Food Tebourba Association, is leading efforts to promote the MD as a model of health and sustainability. Through partnerships and educational initiatives, including digital events, workshops, and university courses, they aim to educate students and professionals about the Mediterranean Diet's cultural, environmental, and health benefits. The focus on "One Health" emphasizes the interconnectedness of human well-being, the


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environment, and community support. The project encourages active citizenship, highlighting the importance of educating future generations to sustain the Mediterranean Diet and foster a sustainable future.

*Recommendation: Integrating the Mediterranean Diet into education systems, with a focus on sustainability and health, can foster active citizenship and sustainability. Collaborations with local institutions and emphasizing the "One Health" approach will enhance its cultural and environmental impact.*

### 2.1.12 Foundation Parma UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy (UNIPR, Italy)

The Foundation Parma UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, with the University of Parma as its scientific supervisor, was established to promote food culture, innovation, and sustainability. During the 2019 UNESCO Forum, it endorsed the 2030 Agenda, committing to fostering cooperation in culture, education, and science to address global challenges.

A key focus of the Foundation is the preservation of traditional diets, particularly the MD, which is recognized for its health benefits, environmental sustainability, and cultural significance. Food is seen not only as cultural heritage but also as a powerful tool for dialogue, inclusion, and sustainable development.

This initiative served as a strategic opportunity to boost the Mediterranean Diet, using regional and international networks to enhance awareness, encourage sustainable food practices, and reinforce its relevance as a global model for health, culture, and sustainability.

*Recommendation: Cities that receive prestigious designations, such as UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy, should use these opportunities to promote sustainable food traditions like the Mediterranean Diet. These titles can help integrate food heritage into urban policies, support local food systems, and foster global collaboration on education, sustainability, and health-conscious eating.*

### 2.1.13 Conclusion

The promotion of the Mediterranean Diet is crucial not only for its health benefits but also for preserving the cultural heritage and environmental sustainability that it represents. The successful initiatives across Spain, Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Turkey, and Italy offer invaluable lessons on how to effectively engage communities, educate stakeholders, and integrate sustainable practices to preserve this diet's timeless value. These experiences highlight that promoting the Mediterranean Diet requires a combination of awareness-building, community-based actions, educational strategies, and the empowerment of local food systems.

The strategies presented in this White Paper underscore the importance of customizing approaches to local contexts while maintaining the universal principles of the Mediterranean Diet—emphasizing fresh, seasonal, and local produce, plant-based foods, and sustainable agricultural practices. Notably, the use of both traditional and modern tools, from in-person educational workshops to digital platforms like TikTok, ensures the reach of these initiatives to diverse audiences, particularly younger generations.

*Key Recommendations*

- Expand Awareness Campaigns: Governments and organizations should implement nationwide and regional awareness campaigns that target children, parents, and communities. These campaigns should emphasize not only the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet but also practical tips for incorporating it into daily life.

- Train Stakeholders and Engage Communities: It is vital to educate educators, community leaders, local farmers, and chefs about the Mediterranean Diet. By providing them with resources, training programs, and tools, these stakeholders can act as ambassadors for the diet, fostering positive change from the ground up. Additionally, community-based activities like cooking workshops,


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gardening projects, and local food festivals can play a key role in spreading knowledge and inspiring action.

- Harness Digital Tools for Engagement: Digital platforms, including social media and interactive apps, offer tremendous opportunities to reach younger audiences. Campaigns like the TikTok challenge in Italy prove that creative, engaging content can boost awareness and interest in healthy eating habits.

- Support Local Agriculture and Sustainable Practices: Initiatives that promote local produce, such as olive oil, fruits, and vegetables, should be encouraged. Supporting the livelihoods of local farmers, through recognition programs like the Selluka Certificate, and promoting local food products can not only preserve traditional diets but also bolster local economies.

- Integrate Mediterranean Diet Education into Formal Systems: Schools, universities, and professional training programs should incorporate the Mediterranean Diet into their curricula. By including the diet as part of broader health education initiatives, we can ensure that future generations understand its value and how to adopt it in their own lives.

- Foster International Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing: The Mediterranean Diet is a shared cultural heritage that transcends national borders. Countries should continue to collaborate on projects that promote the diet and share best practices. Projects like the SWITCHtoHEALTHY initiative exemplify the power of international cooperation to spread knowledge and drive positive change.


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## 2.2 PD - Leveraging the MedDiet Project: A Policy Framework for Promoting the Mediterranean Diet in Egyptian Schools (CEEBA, Egypt)

### 2.2.1 Introduction

This policy paper seeks to inform and guide policymakers in the development of strategies to promote healthy eating habits among schoolchildren. It has been developed by the Confederation of Egyptian European Business Associations (CEEBA), the Egyptian partner of the PRIMA Programme's Switch-to-Healthy Project.

The paper highlights best practices identified through the EU-funded MedDiet project, which focused on schools and students, successfully enhancing the understanding of the Mediterranean Diet among students, teachers, and parents. Drawing from these best practices, policy recommendations and an implementation strategy have been outlined to serve as a resource for Egyptian and Mediterranean policymakers, aiming to foster healthier diets for the next generation.

### 2.2.2 The EU-Funded MedDiet Project

The **MedDiet Project** was a European Union-funded initiative aimed at promoting the Mediterranean Diet (MD) as a model for healthy eating and cultural heritage across Mediterranean countries, including Egypt. The project sought to combat rising rates of obesity, diet-related health issues, and poor nutritional habits, particularly among young people, by integrating the principles of the Mediterranean Diet into school environments.

**Key Objectives:**
**Promote the Mediterranean Diet**: Raise awareness about the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet, which includes high consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and olive oil, while minimizing processed foods and sugars.
**Improve Nutritional Education**: Equip schools, educators, students, and parents with the knowledge and tools needed to adopt and sustain the MD as part of daily life.
**Foster Cultural Connection**: Link the Mediterranean Diet to local cultures and traditions, reinforcing its importance as part of the region's historical and social identity.
**Widespread Adoption**: The project reached over 6,861 students and 1,282 teachers through various educational and practical activities. More than 118 pilot projects were launched in primary and secondary schools, with schools increasingly adopting MD-based teaching modules and making permanent changes to cafeteria menus.
**Cultural Integration**: By linking the Mediterranean Diet to local history and cultural heritage, the project fostered a deeper connection among students and their communities, promoting sustainable, long-term changes in eating habits.
**Capacity Building**: The training programs provided teachers and school administrators with the resources and knowledge necessary to continue promoting the Mediterranean Diet even after the project's conclusion.

The MedDiet Project successfully promoted the Mediterranean Diet as a model for healthy eating and cultural preservation. By focusing on schools and involving educators, students, parents, and policymakers, the project created a strong foundation for long-term, sustainable change in dietary habits. The success of the initiative provides valuable insights and best practices for further integration of the Mediterranean Diet into national nutrition policies.

### 2.2.3 Shift to Processed Foods

Unhealthy eating habits among students in Egypt and other Mediterranean countries have become a critical public health concern. Once celebrated for its traditional Mediterranean diet—rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and olive oil—the region is now witnessing a shift towards processed foods, fast food, and sugary beverages. This dietary transition has contributed to a rise in diet-related health issues, particularly


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among young people. In Egypt, childhood obesity, diabetes, and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have surged due to these poor eating patterns.

**Shift from Traditional Diets to Processed Foods**
The Mediterranean diet, known for protecting against chronic diseases, focuses on plant-based foods, lean proteins, and healthy fats, while limiting refined sugars and red meat. However, economic and cultural shifts have led younger populations in both Egypt and other Mediterranean countries to increasingly consume processed, calorie-dense foods.

Fast food outlets and convenience stores offering affordable, easily accessible items like fried foods, sugary snacks, and carbonated beverages are particularly popular among students. The affordability and aggressive marketing of these options have replaced traditional home-cooked meals with ultra-processed foods high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats. In Egypt, this shift is especially evident in urban areas where fast food chains are rapidly expanding. The traditional Egyptian diet, once centered around whole grains, lentils, vegetables, and lean meats, is being supplanted by fried foods and sugary drinks. Similar trends are observed in Mediterranean countries such as Greece, Italy, and Spain.

**Common Unhealthy Eating Patterns**
**High Consumption of Processed and Fast Foods**: Students now consume more fast food and processed snacks, including fried chicken, burgers, pizza, chips, and sugary desserts, which are high in unhealthy fats and sodium. This leads to health issues such as obesity, hypertension, and high cholesterol.
**Excessive Sugar Intake**: Sugary beverages like sodas, energy drinks, and sweetened juices are a major source of calories. This high sugar intake contributes to weight gain and heightened risks of diabetes. Students also frequently consume pastries and candies, further increasing their sugar consumption.
**Low Intake of Fruits and Vegetables**: While the traditional Mediterranean diet promotes fresh fruits and vegetables, students now consume far fewer of these nutrient-rich foods, particularly in Egypt. This deficiency leads to a lack of essential vitamins, minerals, and fibre, negatively affecting health and cognitive development.
**Irregular Eating Patterns**: Many students skip breakfast, eat late at night, or have irregular meals. Breakfast is often replaced by sugary snacks, which provide little energy for the day. Studies show skipping meals, especially breakfast, is linked to poorer academic performance and weight gain.
**Dependence on Packaged Foods**: Pre-packaged foods high in preservatives and artificial additives have become common in students' diets. Items like chips, instant noodles, and sugary cereals contribute to poor dietary diversity and a lack of essential nutrients.

**Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors**
The shift towards unhealthy eating is driven by urbanization, modernization, and globalization, which have transformed lifestyles and food choices. Many families, facing time constraints and dual-income pressures, turn to convenience foods. Economic factors further influence this trend, as unhealthy processed foods are often cheaper and more accessible than fresh, whole foods. Marketing and media also play a role, as children and adolescents are frequently exposed to advertisements promoting unhealthy food products.

### 2.2.4 Unhealthy Diet: A National Concern

Poor nutrition, obesity, and lack of access to proper food among students in Egypt are highly relevant to policymakers due to their impact on educational outcomes, public health, economic growth, and social equity.

The rise in childhood obesity and associated health conditions is a pressing issue, largely driven by poor dietary habits, sedentary lifestyles, and an increasing reliance on processed foods. These unhealthy habits have led to an array of health problems among students, with childhood obesity being one of the most visible. As Egypt faces one of the highest rates of childhood obesity globally, these trends demand urgent attention to mitigate long-term social, economic, and health impacts.


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**Educational Outcomes**

**Cognitive Development**: Poor nutrition negatively affects cognitive abilities, concentration, and memory. Students lacking proper nutrition are more prone to learning difficulties and lower academic performance, which often leads to higher dropout rates.

**School Attendance**: Malnourished children are more likely to fall ill and miss school, limiting their educational opportunities and potential for future success.

**Public Health**

**Childhood Obesity**: Egypt is experiencing a sharp rise in childhood obesity, fueled by high-calorie, low-nutrient diets rich in processed foods and sugary beverages. This contributes to increased rates of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and other chronic conditions, burdening the healthcare system.

**Malnutrition and Stunting**: Despite rising obesity, malnutrition remains prevalent, especially in rural and low-income areas. Stunting and nutrient deficiencies impair physical and cognitive growth, limiting children's long-term development and opportunities.

**Economic Impacts**

**Future Workforce**: Poor childhood nutrition affects physical and cognitive development, potentially leading to a less productive future workforce, which in turn undermines Egypt's economic growth and competitiveness.

**Healthcare Costs**: Treating obesity and related chronic diseases increases healthcare expenditures. Early intervention through school nutrition programs could reduce the financial strain on the healthcare system in the long term.

**Social Equity**

**Vulnerable Populations**: Students from low-income families are disproportionately affected by poor nutrition. Providing healthy meals in schools can help bridge the gap, offering equal opportunities for children regardless of their socioeconomic background.

**Food Security and Agriculture**

**Promoting Healthy Diets**: Encouraging the consumption of nutritious, locally sourced foods in schools can support local agriculture, improve food security, and promote sustainable farming practices.

**Rise of Childhood Obesity in Egypt**

Obesity, defined as excessive body fat that threatens health, stems from an imbalance between calorie intake and expenditure. Over 35% of children and adolescents in Egypt are now classified as overweight or obese. Poor dietary choices, coupled with a sedentary lifestyle, have caused a surge in childhood obesity rates, which pose significant health risks both immediately and in the long term.

**Health Impacts of Childhood Obesity**

Childhood obesity has serious health consequences. Obese children face an increased risk of high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, and respiratory problems. Furthermore, psychological issues such as low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression are common due to social stigma. Most concerning is the direct link between obesity and type 2 diabetes, a chronic disease that was once rare in children but is now becoming increasingly common.

**Diabetes in Egyptian Students**

Type 2 diabetes, characterized by the body's resistance to insulin, is becoming a significant issue among school-aged children in Egypt, primarily due to poor diet and lack of physical activity.

**Increased Prevalence**: Egypt has one of the highest rates of diabetes in the MENA region, with the rising trend in childhood obesity directly contributing to early diagnoses of type 2 diabetes.


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**Diet and Lifestyle**: High consumption of sugary foods, refined carbohydrates, and processed snacks—combined with insufficient physical activity—exacerbates insulin resistance, increasing the risk of diabetes in children.

**Long-Term Health Risks**: Children diagnosed with type 2 diabetes face serious complications as they age, including heart disease, kidney failure, nerve damage, and vision problems. The earlier the diagnosis, the longer they are exposed to high blood sugar levels, increasing the likelihood of long-term health issues.

**Social and Economic Impacts**
The rise in obesity and diabetes places a significant burden on families and the healthcare system. Managing diabetes involves regular medical care, which can be financially crippling, especially for low-income families. In addition to financial strain, students with these conditions often face social isolation and discrimination, leading to mental health challenges and reduced academic performance.

**Prevention and Intervention Strategies**
To combat the growing obesity and diabetes epidemic, Egypt needs a comprehensive strategy that includes education, policy changes, and community engagement. Effective prevention measures, such as school-based nutrition programs, increased physical activity, and public health campaigns, can help reduce the prevalence of these diseases and improve the long-term health of Egypt's youth.

As traditional diets give way to processed foods and sugary beverages, rates of obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related diseases continue to climb. This poses a significant threat to the country's future health and prosperity. Without prompt action, these preventable conditions will continue to rise, leading to long-term health complications and economic strain. By prioritizing education, policy reform, and community initiatives, Egypt can address the root causes of these diseases and ensure a healthier future for its youth.

### 2.2.5 MedDiet as a model for promoting a healthy diet

The EU funded ENI CBC MED MedDiet Project was implemented between 2012 and 2015 with partners from Egypt, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Spain and Tunisia. It addressed the challenge of unhealthy eating habits and the growing prevalence of diet-related diseases like obesity and diabetes among students in Egypt. Specifically, the project sought to promote healthier dietary patterns by introducing the principles of the Mediterranean diet (MD), which is known for its nutritional benefits and its role in preventing chronic health issues.

**Key challenges that the MedDiet Project tackled include:**
**Poor Nutritional Awareness**: Many students in Egypt lack knowledge about healthy eating habits and the long-term impact of processed, sugary foods on their health. The MedDiet Project aimed to educate students, parents, and teachers about the benefits of the Mediterranean diet through classroom learning, interactive activities, and hands-on experiences like cooking classes and school gardens.

**Inadequate School Meals**: School cafeterias in Egypt often offer meals that are not aligned with healthy dietary guidelines. The project worked on reforming school menus to include more fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other Mediterranean staples while reducing the availability of processed and unhealthy foods.

**Limited Access to Fresh Produce**: In some underfunded schools, access to fresh, locally sourced Mediterranean ingredients is limited. The MedDiet Project sought to overcome this barrier by promoting sustainable agricultural practices and implementing school gardens where students could grow their own Mediterranean diet staples.

By addressing these challenges, the MedDiet Project aimed to foster a healthier food environment in schools, encouraging students to adopt lifelong healthy eating habits and reducing the risk of diet-related diseases.


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The issue of poor nutrition, obesity, and lack of healthy food in schools is pressing for several key reasons, and the MedDiet Project offers a promising solution model due to its focus on promoting the Mediterranean diet and sustainable food practices.

**Why the MedDiet Project is a Suitable Solution Model:**

**Promotion of the Mediterranean Diet:**
The Mediterranean diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and healthy fats (such as olive oil), and it emphasizes moderate consumption of dairy, fish, and poultry. This diet has been associated with reduced risks of obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and other chronic conditions. The MedDiet Project promotes this traditional dietary pattern, which aligns with Egypt's local food heritage and encourages healthy eating habits.

**Sustainability and Local Agriculture:**
The Mediterranean diet encourages the consumption of locally grown, fresh produce, which supports small farmers and sustainable agricultural practices. By focusing on local food systems, the MedDiet Project addresses food security issues and reduces dependency on imported, processed foods, which often contribute to obesity and poor nutrition.

**Cultural Relevance and Feasibility:**
Since the Mediterranean diet has historical and cultural roots in Egypt and other Mediterranean countries, it is more likely to be accepted by the population. Promoting dietary changes that align with local traditions is more feasible and sustainable than introducing foreign diet models.

**Integration into Schools and Communities:**
The MedDiet Project focuses on educational campaigns and integrating nutritional awareness into school programs. By teaching students about healthy eating and providing access to nutritious meals in schools, it addresses both the immediate needs of students and the long-term goal of fostering healthier eating habits.

**Holistic Approach to Health:**
The MedDiet Project does not just focus on diet but also promotes physical activity, balanced lifestyles, and community engagement. This holistic approach is key to combating the complex issue of obesity and poor nutrition among students.

The pressing nature of this issue is tied to the long-term health, educational, and economic impacts of poor nutrition and rising obesity among Egyptian students. The MedDiet Project offers a suitable solution model by promoting the Mediterranean diet, which is culturally relevant, sustainable, and effective in addressing the root causes of the problem. It aims to improve health outcomes, support local agriculture, and promote lifelong healthy eating habits through schools and communities.

### 2.2.6 Best Practices and Lessons Learned from the MedDiet Project

The MedDiet Project, funded by the European Union, sought to promote the Mediterranean diet (MD) as a sustainable and healthy lifestyle choice in schools across Mediterranean countries, including Egypt. Through its initiatives, the project developed best practices and key lessons that can serve as valuable models for future health and nutrition education programs.

**Best Practices**
**Nutritional Education Integration**
**Curriculum Design**: The MedDiet Project successfully integrated lessons on the Mediterranean diet into school curricula. These lessons taught students the importance of balanced diets, the health benefits of MD, and the cultural significance of Mediterranean food traditions.
**Interactive Learning Tools**: The project utilized educational games, lesson plans, and videos to engage students actively. This hands-on approach made learning about healthy eating both fun and memorable.


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**Historical and Cultural Context**: The Mediterranean diet was tied to local culture and history, linking it to students' heritage. This approach increased ownership of the knowledge and reinforced a connection to traditional eating habits.

**Teacher and Administrator Training**

**Capacity Building**: Over 350 teachers and educators received training on MD principles in Egypt. Workshops and training sessions helped educators understand the importance of nutrition education and how to incorporate the MD into both academic and extracurricular activities.

**Resource Distribution**: Teachers were provided with toolkits containing educational materials, such as manuals, games, and communication strategies. These resources ensured that teachers had the tools they needed to effectively promote the Mediterranean diet in schools.

**Practical, Experiential Learning**

**Cooking Classes**: The project emphasized the importance of hands-on experiences by organizing cooking classes where students prepared Mediterranean meals using fresh ingredients. This approach helped students understand the value of whole foods like olive oil, vegetables, and whole grains.

**Tasting Labs**: Tasting sessions allowed students to experience the flavors and textures of Mediterranean dishes, reinforcing the taste and health benefits of the diet.

**School Gardens**: The creation of school gardens where students grew Mediterranean staples like tomatoes, cucumbers, and herbs encouraged sustainable agriculture and an understanding of where food comes from.

**Community and Parental Engagement**

**Family Involvement**: Parents were actively involved in many of the project's activities, such as maintaining school gardens and participating in cooking workshops. This family-based approach fostered a shared commitment to healthy eating, extending the impact of the project beyond the classroom.

**Competitions and Awards**: Organizing contests, such as cooking competitions, drew the community together and motivated students to learn more about the Mediterranean diet. Prizes like cooking kits and gardening tools further incentivized student participation.

**School Meal Reforms**

**Menu Adjustments**: The project worked with schools to reform cafeteria menus by incorporating more Mediterranean diet foods, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, while limiting processed foods.

**Pilot Programs**: Pilot initiatives were launched in select schools to assess the acceptance of Mediterranean-style meals among students. This provided valuable feedback on how best to scale up the program to more schools.

**Lessons Learned**

**Cultural Resistance to Dietary Changes**

**Challenge**: One significant lesson learned was the cultural resistance to moving away from processed foods and sugary snacks, which had become common in the diets of many students. This resistance was especially strong in areas where fast food and snacks are more accessible and affordable.

**Solution**: The project found that linking the Mediterranean diet to local culture and traditions helped overcome some of this resistance. By framing the diet as part of students' heritage, the project made the diet more relatable and acceptable.

**Teacher Training is Essential**

**Lesson**: Comprehensive teacher training was critical to the success of the project. Without adequate training, educators would not have been able to effectively integrate the Mediterranean diet into their teaching. Training sessions not only built awareness but empowered educators to implement activities confidently.

**Importance of Experiential Learning**

**Lesson**: The hands-on, practical components of the MedDiet Project—cooking classes, tasting labs, and school gardens—proved to be highly effective in helping students internalize the principles of the Mediterranean diet. Experiential learning had a stronger, longer-lasting impact than traditional classroom lectures alone.

**Parental Involvement Strengthens Impact**

**Lesson**: Engaging parents in the project's activities was key to reinforcing healthy habits at home. Children are more likely to adopt long-term behavioral changes when they are supported by their families. By involving parents in activities like cooking classes and garden maintenance, the project extended its reach beyond school and into family homes.

**Continuous Monitoring and Feedback**


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**Lesson**: The use of pilot programs and ongoing feedback mechanisms, such as student and parent surveys, helped fine-tune project strategies. These insights allowed for the adjustment of educational materials and school meals to better fit local preferences and needs.

The MedDiet Project successfully demonstrated that promoting the Mediterranean diet in schools can be an effective way to combat unhealthy eating habits and reduce the risk of diet-related diseases like obesity and diabetes among students. Through its focus on practical, hands-on experiences, teacher training, community engagement, and policy advocacy, the project developed a series of best practices that can serve as a model for similar health initiatives in Egypt and beyond. The lessons learned emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity, sustainability, and the critical role of educators and parents in ensuring lasting behavioral change.

### 2.2.7 MedDiet Best Practices and Policy Alignment

The MedDiet Project's best practices, which emphasize nutrition education, community engagement, and sustainable school meal reforms, align with several current policy efforts in Egypt and other Mediterranean countries. However, the project also addresses critical gaps in existing policies related to health and nutrition in schools, particularly with respect to dietary education and the integration of cultural food practices. Below is a discussion of how MedDiet's best practices align with, support, and potentially fill gaps in existing or potential policies.

**Nutritional Education in Schools**
**Best Practice:** The MedDiet Project integrated nutrition education into classes, teaching students the benefits of the Mediterranean diet (MD) through interactive learning tools, cooking classes, and hands-on experiences like school gardens. This method not only provides knowledge but encourages long-term healthy eating habits by making the education process engaging and culturally relevant.

**Policy Alignment and Gaps:**
**Current Policy:** Egyptian education policies, like in many countries, do not prioritize nutrition education as a compulsory component of the school curriculum. While health and physical education are included, they often lack detailed guidance on nutrition or the cultural relevance of dietary practices.
**Filling the Gap:** The MedDiet approach directly addresses this gap by advocating for the inclusion of nutrition education based on the MD model, which is culturally appropriate for Mediterranean countries. Introducing compulsory nutrition lessons, as the MedDiet Project suggests, would align with global health guidelines and address the growing problem of childhood obesity and malnutrition.

**Teacher Training and Capacity Building**
**Best Practice:** The MedDiet Project trained over 350 teachers and school administrators in MD principles, equipping them with the tools, resources, and confidence to implement nutrition education and promote healthy eating within their schools.
**Policy Alignment and Gaps:**
**Current Policy:** Most educational policies in Egypt and other Mediterranean countries do not include comprehensive teacher training on nutrition education. Teachers are often under-equipped to handle health and diet-related topics, which limits the effectiveness of school-based nutrition programs.
**Filling the Gap:** Incorporating structured teacher training programs, as demonstrated by the MedDiet Project, into national education policies would greatly enhance the capacity of schools to promote healthy eating. Policymakers can make this training mandatory for educators, ensuring they have the knowledge and resources to support the successful implementation of school-based nutrition programs.

**School Meal Reforms**
**Best Practice:** The project piloted menu adjustments in schools to incorporate more Mediterranean foods like fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and healthy fats (e.g., olive oil). This effort was combined with efforts to reduce processed foods and sugary snacks commonly found in school cafeterias.
**Policy Alignment and Gaps:**


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**Current Policy:** In Egypt, there are school nutrition policies, but they often fail to set strict guidelines on what constitutes a healthy meal, leaving the quality of food in school cafeterias inconsistent. Processed and unhealthy food options remain prevalent, particularly in underfunded schools.
**Filling the Gap:** MedDiet's best practice of revising school menus to adhere to MD principles provides a model that can be adopted into national school meal policies. By implementing guidelines that prioritize Mediterranean-style meals, governments can ensure students receive balanced and culturally appropriate meals, addressing both health concerns and local food traditions. This initiative also helps mitigate the risk of diet-related diseases like diabetes and obesity, a growing concern in the country.

**Sustainability and Access to Fresh Ingredients**
**Best Practice:** The project promoted the use of school gardens where students grow Mediterranean staples like tomatoes, cucumbers, and herbs, supporting sustainable agriculture and teaching the value of fresh, local produce. This initiative was particularly useful in schools with limited resources for sourcing fresh ingredients.
**Policy Alignment and Gaps:**
**Current Policy:** There are currently limited policies in Egypt that incentivize or mandate the use of local, sustainable ingredients in school meals. Most schools rely on pre-packaged foods that are easier to distribute but less nutritious. In underfunded schools, access to fresh ingredients is a significant barrier to implementing healthier meal options.
**Filling the Gap:** MedDiet's school garden initiative provides a feasible, scalable solution to address this gap. If integrated into national policy, school gardens could not only improve access to fresh ingredients but also foster a hands-on understanding of agriculture and sustainability among students. By incorporating garden-based learning and fresh food initiatives into educational policies, governments could promote both health and environmental goals in line with sustainable development objectives.

**Community and Parental Engagement**
**Best Practice:** One of the key successes of the MedDiet Project was involving parents and the broader community in nutrition education and school activities, such as maintaining school gardens and participating in cooking workshops. This community-based approach created a support system that extended healthy eating habits beyond the school environment.
**Policy Alignment and Gaps:**
**Current Policy:** While Egyptian health policies have focused on school-based interventions, they often overlook the role of parental involvement in shaping children's eating habits. Most existing programs do not provide a framework for actively engaging parents and communities in school health initiatives.
**Filling the Gap:** MedDiet's focus on family and community engagement fills a critical gap in current policies by recognizing that sustainable dietary changes require cooperation between schools and families. Policymakers could build on this by formalizing programs that encourage parent-teacher collaboration on nutrition education, similar to MedDiet's family cooking classes and workshops. Such initiatives could be expanded to include broader community activities like local food fairs and farm visits, reinforcing healthy eating habits across different social environments.

**Addressing Obesity and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)**
**Best Practice:** Through education and practical activities, the MedDiet Project aimed to reduce the risk of obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes in school-aged children. It provided students with the knowledge and skills to adopt healthier eating habits, thereby reducing their risk of developing NCDs in the future.
**Policy Alignment and Gaps:**
**Current Policy:** Egypt, like many countries, has adopted broad health policies aimed at reducing NCDs, but these efforts often lack targeted interventions for school-aged children. While childhood obesity is a growing concern, current policies have not sufficiently tackled the root causes of unhealthy eating habits among students.
**Filling the Gap:** By introducing the Mediterranean diet as a school-based intervention, the MedDiet Project directly addresses the gaps in current health policies targeting childhood obesity. The project's focus on both education and environmental changes (e.g., improved school meals and gardens) aligns with global strategies


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to combat NCDs. National policy could benefit from adopting these best practices on a larger scale, ensuring that students across the country have access to nutrition education and healthier food environments.

**Conclusion**

The MedDiet Project offers a comprehensive framework that aligns well with existing health and education policies while filling important gaps in the areas of nutrition education, school meal reforms, and community engagement. By formalizing the project's best practices into national policies, Egypt and other Mediterranean countries could create sustainable, culturally relevant solutions to the growing problem of childhood obesity and diet-related diseases. These practices offer not just immediate health benefits but also long-term improvements in the overall quality of life for future generations.

### 2.2.8 Roadmap for Policymakers to Adopt and Apply MedDiet Recommendations

To successfully adopt the MedDiet Project's best practices in Egypt's health and education sectors, policymakers can follow a phased and collaborative approach. Below is a roadmap outlining key steps for implementation, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring progress.

***Integrate Nutrition Education into School Curricula***

Objective: Include Mediterranean diet-based nutrition education in Egyptian school curricula.
Steps for Action:
Curriculum Reform: Work with the Ministry of Education, health experts, and curriculum developers to create and integrate nutrition lessons based on the Mediterranean diet (MD).
Pilot Programs: Start with pilot programs in selected schools to test the feasibility of curriculum changes.
Teacher Training: Implement mandatory teacher training programs to equip educators with the skills to deliver nutrition education.
Stakeholder Roles:
Ministry of Education: Lead curriculum development and integration.
Local Schools: Serve as pilot locations for curriculum reforms and teacher training.
NGOs/Health Organizations: Provide expertise and materials to support educational content.
Parents: Encourage engagement through workshops on nutrition education at home.
Monitoring and Evaluation:
Track students' knowledge of healthy eating habits through pre- and post-curriculum assessments.
Evaluate changes in dietary habits and obesity rates in pilot schools over 1–3 years.

***Train Teachers on Nutrition Education***

Objective: Equip teachers with the skills to effectively deliver nutrition education and foster a healthy eating culture.
Steps for Action:
Mandatory Training Programs: Develop and implement nationwide teacher training modules focused on MD principles and nutrition education best practices.
Resource Allocation: Provide schools with the necessary teaching materials and resources, such as lesson plans, visual aids, and practical tools.
Professional Development Credits: Incentivize participation by offering professional development credits for teachers who complete training programs.
Stakeholder Roles:
Ministry of Education: Develop and enforce mandatory teacher training.
Teachers' Associations: Advocate for and participate in the professional development of educators.
NGOs/Health Experts: Provide expertise and resources for training programs.
Monitoring and Evaluation:
Evaluate teacher knowledge before and after training.
Track the implementation of nutrition lessons in classrooms and student engagement levels.


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***Reform School Meal Programs***

Objective: Improve the quality of school meals by prioritizing Mediterranean-inspired foods.

Steps for Action:

Set Nutritional Standards: Develop national guidelines to ensure school meals meet MD principles, focusing on fresh, local ingredients and reduced processed foods.

Partnerships with Local Producers: Collaborate with local farmers and food suppliers to ensure sustainable, affordable access to fresh ingredients.

Meal Program Overhaul: Conduct a phased transition to healthier menus in public schools, starting with underfunded schools where processed food prevalence is highest.

Stakeholder Roles:

Government (Ministries of Health, Education, and Agriculture): Establish and enforce national nutritional guidelines.

Local Farmers/Food Producers: Supply fresh, culturally appropriate ingredients to schools.

School Canteens/Administrators: Implement menu reforms and ensure adherence to new guidelines.

NGOs: Assist in advocacy and capacity-building for schools with limited resources.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Conduct regular nutritional audits of school menus.

Measure student health outcomes, including body mass index (BMI) and incidence of diet-related illnesses, to track improvements.

***Promote Sustainability and Access to Fresh Ingredients Through School Gardens***

Objective: Encourage the use of school gardens to support sustainable agriculture and access to fresh ingredients.

Steps for Action:

National School Garden Initiative: Launch a nationwide program to establish and maintain school gardens, particularly in urban and rural schools with limited resources.

Agricultural Education: Incorporate gardening activities into the school curriculum to teach students about sustainability and nutrition.

Government Grants: Provide financial incentives and grants to schools that commit to building and maintaining gardens.

Stakeholder Roles:

Ministry of Agriculture: Provide guidance and support for setting up gardens and sustainable agricultural practices.

Local Schools: Implement and maintain school gardens, incorporating them into lessons.

NGOs/Community Organizations: Offer resources, training, and ongoing support to help schools launch garden projects.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Evaluate the impact of gardens on the availability of fresh produce in school meals.

Survey student attitudes toward sustainable agriculture and nutrition post-implementation.

***Engage Parents and Communities in Nutrition Education***

Objective: Extend healthy eating habits from schools to homes by actively involving parents and communities.

Steps for Action:

Parent-Teacher Collaboration: Establish regular workshops and cooking classes to teach parents how to adopt MD principles at home.

Community Involvement: Organize local food fairs, farm visits, and nutrition workshops to increase community awareness and participation.

Social Media Campaigns: Use digital platforms to reach broader audiences with educational materials and community-driven success stories.

Stakeholder Roles:

Local Governments: Sponsor community events and awareness campaigns.

Parents: Participate in workshops and apply nutrition lessons at home.

NGOs/Community Organizations: Lead outreach and community engagement efforts.

Monitoring and Evaluation:


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Measure community participation rates in workshops and events.
Assess changes in family dietary habits through surveys and follow-ups.

***Address Obesity and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)***
Objective: Reduce the incidence of obesity and NCDs among school-aged children by promoting healthy dietary habits.
Steps for Action:
Health Monitoring in Schools: Implement regular health screenings to track students' BMI, blood pressure, and other indicators of health.
Holistic Approach: Combine education on healthy eating with physical activity programs to encourage an overall healthy lifestyle.
School Nutrition Councils: Create councils made up of teachers, parents, health professionals, and students to oversee and monitor nutrition programs.
Stakeholder Roles:
Ministry of Health: Provide health monitoring tools and guidance for schools.
School Health Officers: Conduct regular health screenings and assessments.
Parents/Community Members: Participate in school health initiatives and support healthy eating at home.
Monitoring and Evaluation:
Track health indicators such as obesity rates, the prevalence of NCDs, and the overall physical health of students.
Use longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of nutritional and educational interventions.

### 2.2.9 Enhancing Dietary Education with Digital Tools: A Unified Approach Between the Switch-to-Healthy and MedDiet Projects

The rising concern over unhealthy diets in Mediterranean countries requires innovative solutions. Both the Switch-to-Healthy Project and the MedDiet Project aim to promote healthier dietary habits, with Switch-to-Healthy developing interactive digital tools to engage families, especially children, in adopting sustainable food behaviors. This policy paper explores how these digital tools can be integrated into the MedDiet Project's educational framework, targeting both schools and parental engagement.

The objective is to combine the strengths of both projects by embedding Switch-to-Healthy's digital tools, including games, interactive platforms, and educational resources, into the MedDiet's school-based curriculum to improve learning and parent participation in promoting healthier diets.

**Key Digital Tools Developed by Switch-to-Healthy:**
Interactive Learning Platforms: Engage students with interactive games and quizzes about the Mediterranean diet and healthy snacking.
Family Engagement Resources: Digital tools designed to foster collaboration between children and parents, helping them make healthier food choices at home.
Educational Apps: Accessible resources for schools and parents that deliver educational content on nutrition and sustainability in a fun and engaging way.

**Methodology for Integration:**
Curriculum Integration: Schools can use Switch-to-Healthy's interactive tools in classrooms, integrating them with the MedDiet's existing lessons on the Mediterranean diet.
Parental Involvement: The tools offer parents access to real-time educational content that aligns with their child's in-school learning, ensuring a cohesive message.
Training Educators: Teachers are provided with professional development to effectively use these digital tools, ensuring smooth integration into the school environment.

**Expected Outcomes:**
Enhanced student learning about healthy eating.


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Stronger parental involvement in children's dietary habits.
Increased use of digital technology to promote health education.
Improved public health outcomes through sustained dietary changes.

Combining the innovative digital tools from the Switch-to-Healthy Project with the MedDiet Project's educational framework offers a promising path forward in promoting the Mediterranean diet. This integration will lead to more interactive and engaging learning experiences in schools, while also reinforcing the role of parents in sustaining these healthy habits at home.

### 2.2.10 Conclusion

The Egyptian health system, like in many Mediterranean countries, incurs substantial losses due to unhealthy diets. This includes rising healthcare costs linked to a significant portion of the population suffering from diabetes, decreased workforce productivity, and long-term economic repercussions. Implementing comprehensive public health strategies and policy interventions is essential to addressing these dietary challenges, ultimately fostering a healthier population.
The policy recommendations outlined in this paper, which draw on the best practices of the MedDiet Project and incorporate educational tools from the Switch-to-Healthy Project, can serve as a valuable guide for policymakers and stakeholders in tackling this issue on a national scale.

### 2.2.11 References

For reference please see here the developped MedDiet Guidelines for teachers, and the MedDiet final brochure: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/18xubwaufo19iJ2HOh4rq30Hqa9h1HYGV?usp=share_link

For reference on the educational tools developped within the Switch-to-Healthy Project, please see the following link: https://switchtohealthy.eu/switchtohealthy-project/#workplan-8211-learning-through-playing%C2%A0approach


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# 3. Policy Briefs

## 3.1 PB - Gastronomic Tourist Routes for the Mediterranean Diet (KTB, Turkey)

The concept of touristic product has the position of a combined product due to this unique feature. The touristic product is a complex set of goods and services consisting of natural, social, political and psychological data brought together and rearranged in tourism enterprises and tourism regions to meet the multidimensional needs of modern people. The concept of tourism product has a combined product status due to this unique feature. A tourism product is a complex set of goods and services consisting of natural, social, political and psychological data brought together and rearranged in tourism establishments and tourism regions to meet the multidimensional needs of contemporary people.

There are some features that a destination must have in order to create a touristic product. These can be listed as attractiveness, accessibility, operating tourism businesses, events and image. The concept of attractiveness refers that tourists prefer one place to another, while accessibility means the ease of accessibility of the tourist to the product and service offered. Tourism businesses are also situated in the heart of tourism that tourism service cannot be provided without these businesses. Image describes the positive or negative impressions on the touristic product while events are among the reasons for purchasing touristic products.

Due to its structural characteristics of tourism, a tourist participating in tourism activities cannot benefit from only one element. On the contrary, he/she purchases the "basic tourism product" that emerges from the combination of many social, economic and geographical elements. This product emerges as an important factor in the formation of the consumer's holiday experience.

The concept of gastronomy is considered as a discipline that investigates the relationship between all consumable foods and beverages and culture, and also as a discipline that investigates the art of eating and drinking well. In addition, gastronomy is defined as a healthy, well-organized, pleasant and delicious cuisine, dining order and system. In which the aesthetics and beauty of the plate of the prepared meal and the glass of the served drink are highlighted as a work of art. Gastronomy is also seen as an art in which the visual, auditory, taste, features and beauties of food and beverages are revealed. Within the framework of these definitions, gastronomy can be defined as a discipline that examines the table arrangements, flavors, preparations, visuals and the relationship between these foods and beverages in the culinary culture, researches delicious food and pleasant beverages and is called an artistic activity by those who participate in this activity.

Gastronomy, through the best possible nutrition, aiming to protect people's health and ensure that they enjoy life has a very important place in tourism as well. Visitors, who travel and want to spend their holidays, regardless of their purpose need to be nourished in order to survive at their destination or during the journey. This includes the food and beverage factor within tourism. In addition to meeting this as a need, there are also visitors who travel just for the pleasure they get from eating and consuming beverage. The travels made for this purpose are considered within the framework of gastronomy tourism.

In addition, individuals who participate in tourism activities for different touristic purposes, other than those who travel for gastronomy tourism, attach more importance to food and beverage experiences. Tourists who visit a destination within the scope of a specific tour attach importance to food and beverage experiences and, in this direction; they eat the local food, buy local food products and visit local markets. Gastronomy tourism, which is quite important among communities with rural tourism opportunities, supports rural tourism activities and ensures the preservation and development of cultural heritage.

In order to extend the duration of tourism activities it is very important to diversify touristic products. Considering that people want to benefit from food and beverage activities in the places they visit for curiosity or for nutritional purposes, gastronomy tourism can be a supporting element for broader tourism. In this context, the importance of local products and dishes used in the Mediterranean Region culinary culture is


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increasing day by day. The use of these local cuisine elements in terms of regional tourism attractiveness can add significant value to the region. For this, tourism businesses in the region need to use these cuisine elements and introduce and present them to visitors. In addition, studies on the use of local culinary culture as a supporting product within the scope of festival tourism emphasize that local food and beverage demand can be used as a supporting product in the marketing of many touristic products.

Mediterranean dietary habits are traditionally based on grains, olive oil, vegetables and fruits, seafood, dairy products and spices. It is known that olives, olive oil and wheat, which have an important place in the Mediterranean dietary culture, have been grown and used in the region since the early periods of history. While onions, garlic and leeks remain among the most important nutrients of the region, white and red beets, chard and okra, whose homeland is stated to be Mediterranean, are among the most consumed vegetables along with eggplants and cucumbers brought from abroad.

There are yet many working need to be done when the local products are in question because for example there are local dishes that have not yet been registered in catalogues. There are dishes that have a deep-rooted past and are known under different names depending on the zone. There are dishes that have the same name but are prepared differently. Local governments, institutions and organizations are obliged to register their own local products and dishes and there is a need to make thorough catalogues for distinction. The local product market makes a big step forward with the works on geographical indication and there should be a race on obtaining this mark in order to register the products so that the consumers would know the value of the products.

Gastronomy tourism is a very old phenomenon. People who traded on the silk and spice routes thousands of years ago and made an effort to reach spices, olive oil and wine have been replaced by people who prefer this business for its experience and pleasure rather than its trade. Within the gastronomy tourism industry, it is also necessary to consider travel agencies and guides specializing in gastronomy, media related to gastronomy, television programs and magazines, travel writers, gastronomy-related activities, wine producers and vineyards, farmers and producers. In this sense, all the Mediterranean region has extremely rich values in terms of gastronomy tourism potential. One of the important indicators of this wealth is the increasing number of geographically indicated products specific to the region.

The aim of gastronomy tourism is to provide tourists the opportunity to experience local products, foods, drinks, regional dishes and taste various types of wine. In addition to local fruit wines, facilities that produce grape wine can also offer their guests the opportunity to tour vineyards, observe wine production, taste and even stay. In addition, various local markets, festivals, fairs, gastronomy tours and tasting events organization where local foods and local dishes are exhibited that will attract the attention of tourists are crucial for the sector.

The importance of experiencing food cultures by visitors and gastronomy tourism has become one of the most popular alternative tourism types in recent years. According to the World Tourism Organization, more than one-third of a tourist's spending is on food. Market research in this area shows that there is an increase in gastronomy tourists and that this type of tourist is a tourist who consumes above average, values originality and rejects uniformity. In gastronomy tourism, the primary motivation is the interest in eating and drinking and experiencing regional dishes and the production stages of these dishes.

In the regions where the majority of olive oil production takes place, the uncertainty caused by the heavy dependence on olive cultivation and the inability to predict the annual production amount and quality of olives with certainty has led to the establishment of a symbiosis between the agricultural and tourism sectors in order to develop sustainable tourism in these regions, increase the income level of people living in rural areas and prevent migration as a result of high unemployment rates in rural areas. In these regions, local resources related to olive oil production are evaluated and services offered to tourists are diversified through olive harvest, mill visits, oil tastings, mill breakfasts and guided tours.


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Festivals that present gastronomic attractions increase tourism activity in the regions. Harvest festivals for the product group with geographical indications specific to regional products are among the events that will increase the number of visitors to the region in the relevant period and pave the way for more people to be curious about. In these festivals, visitors physically taste the local products while also experiencing the atmosphere and culture of the place they are in. Enriching the programs of these festivals and adding activities that will increase the length of stay of the participants will make significant contributions to the regional economy.

The slow food movement, which is developing in the world, is thought to be quite suitable for the Mediterranean Region and especially for the summer resorts of the region. The most important reason for this is both the lack of fast food culture in the region and the diversity of local wild herbs. The suitability of the movement in question and ensuring the region's acceptability worldwide is again an element that can be used as an important actor within the framework of gastronomy.

- In recent years, with the positive effects of olives and olive oil on human health and nutrition being much more widely recognized, interest in olive products and olive tourism has increased. As a production system, olive tourism has begun to stand out as a “niche market area” with the fulfillment of the requirements of rural tourism in areas where olives are grown. With special tours, visitors can learn detailed information about olive cultivation, olive fruit and olive oil production, visit olive oil factories and taste different olive oils as well as meals made with olive oil. Firstly, olive groves are visited, information is given about olive production techniques and areas of use, harvesting is carried out in the olive grove, olives collected after harvest are sent to the olive factory integrated into the same business for pressing. Detailed information is given to visitors about every stage from production to harvest, from harvest to pressing and product processing with the help of a guide. Visitors who are informed about the subject have the opportunity to taste olives and olive oil in the olive and olive oil tasting area as well as purchasing many different products including cosmetics obtained from olives.

- Herb festivals, culture and art festivals related to the regional products, international vine harvest festivals, open sea fishing tournaments, olive oil harvest festival, local products market, organic products fair, olive, olive oil, dairy products and technologies fair are successfully implemented organizations all related to the Mediterranean diet that enhances tourism opportunities in the region.

- Establishing Mediterranean Cuisine Corners and concepts in themed restaurants including dishes specific to the Mediterranean cuisine in the open buffets of businesses operating in the accommodation sector and organizing special shop or sales cart concept selling regional products specific to the Mediterranean Region and offering visitors the opportunity to shop from there are among the steps to promote Mediterranean dietary behaviors.

- Organizing one-special-night events where foods and beverages specific to the Mediterranean cuisine are offered, having chefs specialized in Mediterranean Region cuisine in the accommodation businesses and restaurants, encouraging the opening of restaurants in city centers that prepare dishes specific to the Mediterranean Region would have a huge impact in spreading Mediterranean dietary behaviors.

- The local authorities have to work on creating brochures specific to the Mediterranean Region cuisine and providing tourists with the opportunity to examine them by placing them in travel vehicles and in the rest areas of accommodation businesses. Travel companies that bring tourists to the region should organize trips to markets where regional products are sold, and visitors should be provided with the opportunity to shop and get to know this culture. Regional products should be offered and promoted to tourists as a travel allowance during the tours organized by travel companies. Small incentive gifts should be given so that tourists can share photos and names of products specific to the Mediterranean cuisine they eat on social media.


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- A very crucial element is to ensure the geographical indication applications for the registration of gastronomic elements specific to the Mediterranean Region. Geographical indications enable people to travel to the areas where the product is cultivated due to its strong connection with its origin, make significant contributions to the revitalization of tourism and the prominence of local and regional products.

- Opening culinary museums where local products specific to the Mediterranean Region cuisine and the culture are found are also helpful for visitors spending time in the region. This also can be supported with a catalogue book study that introduces the cuisine of the Mediterranean Region and includes local products. Organizing courses for young people living in the Mediterranean Region would increase the awareness and promote the use of their own culinary culture.

- Organizing festivals specific to the culinary culture of the Mediterranean Region provide important contributions to the region where they are held, such as the revival of culture, social cohesion, the activation of rural tourism and economic growth.



*Figure 4: Awareness actions in Turkey*

## 3.2 PB - Study of reward mechanisms and online challenges for the promotion of the Mediterranean Diet among young generations: the experience of the Contest and the TikTok challenge in schools in the Campania Region (REGIONE CAMPANIA, Italy)

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The 2024 competition, "Create Your Commercial for a Correct Diet," was part of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY Project, an initiative aimed at promoting healthy dietary practices rooted in the Mediterranean Diet among young people in the Campania Region. Over 3,100 students and 460 teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools participated, creating over 190 video commercials. These commercials celebrated the Mediterranean Diet, showcasing local foods and nutritional benefits through creative media, including


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animated cartoons, songs, and performances. The initiative was further boosted by a TikTok challenge, engaging over 13,000 online interactions and awarding the "Mediterranean Diet Influencer" title to the video with the most likes. The initiative highlights the effectiveness of social media and digital content creation in promoting healthy dietary habits among younger generations.

**KEY INSIGHTS**

1. High Participation and Engagement:
   - The competition reached a wide audience, involving 3,100 students and 460 teachers from multiple schools across the Campania region.
   - Over 190 promotional videos were produced, demonstrating a strong interest in the principles of the Mediterranean Diet and local agricultural products among students.
2. Innovative Use of Social Media:
   - The TikTok challenge within the competition generated over 13,000 interactions, capturing students' attention through a platform they actively use.
   - A special prize was awarded to the class with the most popular video on TikTok, recognizing them as the "Mediterranean Diet Influencers" and awarding a field trip to an educational farm, making the experience both rewarding and educational.
3. Recognition and Incentives:
   - Seven schools received awards (plaques and local agrifood products) for their commercials, which included categories for best spots, originality, and most likes on TikTok.
4. Positive Feedback from Participants and the Community:
   - The initiative successfully involved educators, students, and local communities, drawing attention from media outlets and local policymakers.
   - Feedback from participants indicated an increased awareness and appreciation for the Mediterranean Diet and local food heritage, suggesting long-term educational impact.



*Figure 5: Study visit on Farm as reward for school contest in Campania Region*

**POLICY RECCOMENDATIONS**

Building on the valuable lessons learned from the Contest and TikTok challenge in schools across the Campania Region, several strategies can be implemented to further amplify the impact of the Mediterranean Diet message. These experiences have highlighted the effectiveness of engaging young people through popular digital platforms and hands-on activities, creating lasting connections to healthy eating habits.

1. Expand Social Media Challenges to Engage More Young People:


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Building on the success of the TikTok challenge, future projects should leverage social media platforms more extensively to reach a wider audience. By tapping into the platforms most popular with young people, we can create more opportunities for engagement. Collaborations with influencers and content creators could amplify the message, bringing Mediterranean Diet principles into the spotlight and making them more relatable for a younger generation.

2. Provide Experiential Rewards Linked to Nutritional Education:

To deepen participants' understanding of healthy eating, it's essential to continue offering hands-on experiences, such as farm visits and workshops. These experiential rewards not only offer practical insights into sustainable food practices but also engage participants in meaningful ways. Additionally, introducing further incentives—such as scholarships or certifications for students—could motivate more individuals to actively participate and enhance the recognition of their efforts.

3. Develop a Regional Best Practice Framework:

The success of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY initiative provides a valuable opportunity to create a best-practice framework for promoting dietary awareness. By documenting and sharing the methodologies and results, this framework can serve as a model for other regions. Encouraging the adoption of similar programs, tailored to local dietary habits and cultural contexts, while incorporating social media challenges, would further promote the Mediterranean Diet and engage youth across diverse regions.

**CONCLUSION**

The SWITCHtoHEALTHY Project's 2024 competition demonstrates that combining creative digital media and social media challenges with experiential rewards is an effective strategy to promote the Mediterranean Diet among young people. By leveraging familiar platforms like TikTok, the initiative resonated with students and cultivated greater awareness about healthy eating habits rooted in local culture and agriculture. Scaling this model to other regions, incorporating more social media elements, and expanding experiential learning opportunities could make a significant impact on dietary awareness and health behaviours in young populations.

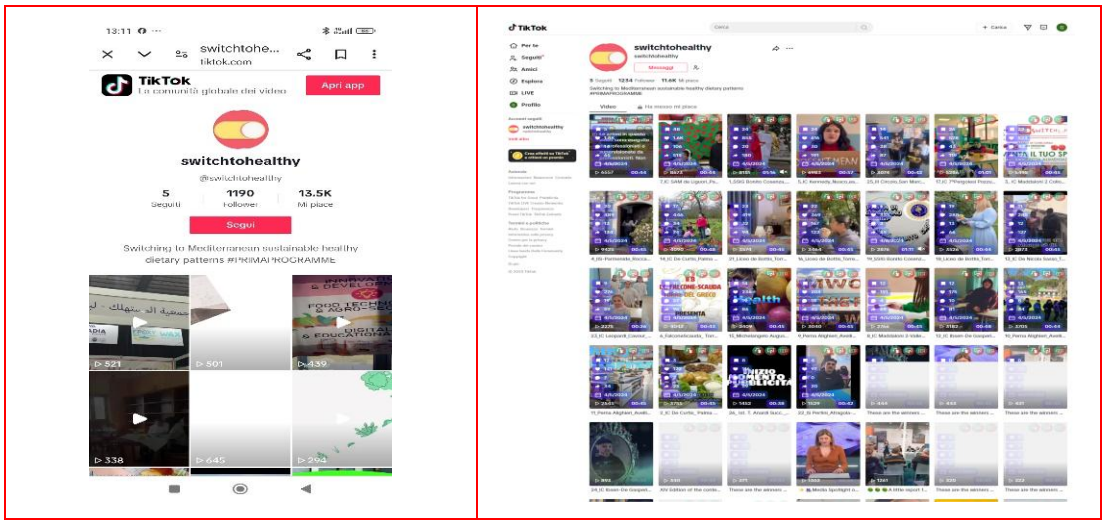



*Figure 6: TikTok Challenge*

## 3.3 PB - Recommendations to promote the integral sustainability of the food system through the food offered at school canteens (DACC, Spain)

**Introduction**

Food is the nexus between agriculture, health, the environment and consumers. The way in which its agents are interrelated and linked is also the way in which we focus on the future. As a society, we have the challenge


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of dealing with a series of needs such as the guarantee of meeting the demand for food, and at the same time responding to the pressure on natural resources, the survival of small and medium-sized farms that protect the territory and keep it alive, the maintenance of productive capacity and the promotion of healthier eating patterns. This scenario obliges us to adopt active and shared strategies aimed at allowing us to identify opportunities to build a sustainable, safe, resilient, healthy and universally accessible food system.

The agri-food system is a strategic sector due to the essential function it carries out in the provision of food but also for the social and environmental contribution to the management and custody of the territory, the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Encouraging its environmental, economic and social sustainability is key to guaranteeing a local food supply that, therefore, reduces the environmental footprint while contributing to territorial balance, the economic viability of agri-food companies and the maintenance of the products that make culinary culture possible.

On the other hand, the positive impact of the Mediterranean diet on people's health and that of the environment is indisputable. The fact that the Mediterranean basin produces a large amount of high-quality food, which is the basis of a healthy and sustainable diet, allows us at the same time to have certain know-how in the kitchen with regard to different culinary techniques and several habits and customs around the table that need to be assessed in order to reverse the loss of adherence to the Mediterranean diet.
It is in this framework that we highlight the need to promote a strategy so that public administrations, through public food procurement as a tool for driving change, can promote the transition towards production and purchase models foods that promote the sustainability of the food system.

Given the extent of public sector food demand, public food procurement is a policy tool with the potential to profoundly influence both consumption patterns and food production, as well as contributing to the overall sustainability of the food system in terms of its three dimensions: social, economic and environmental.
The recommendations proposed below aim to give a boost to this process of change in order to promote the sustainability of the territory.

**Mission**
The **Recommendations for Promoting the Sustainability of the Food System through the Public Procurement of the food offering that is incorporated into School Canteens** seek the incorporation in school menus of food from local primary producers, especially those who work with sustainable production systems, since in this way a contribution is made to local development and a commitment is made to agricultural and livestock activity and fishing while promoting healthy eating in public school meals based on dishes prepared with fresh, seasonal and local ingredients.

These recommendations aim to:
- Offer clear and practical guidance for the institutions in charge of procuring the management services for canteens in schools.
- Facilitate the inclusion of criteria that favour the overall sustainability - economic, social and environmental - of the agri-food system.
- Reduce the impact that the possible situations that have arisen could have both on the food supply to schools and on the sale of produce.
- Encourage the participation of canteens in the educational project at the school, especially in the field of food education.
- Contribute to healthy eating based on fresh, locally sourced ingredients and a high-quality service offering.

**Reference regulations**
The reference directives in the European field on public procurement entered into force in 2014 and at present the regulatory framework consists of:
1. Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement: regulates procurement in the so-called ordinary sectors.


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2. Directive 2014/25/EU on procurement by entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors: regulates the so-called special sectors.
3. Directive 2014/23/EU on the awarding of concession contracts.

Thus, the directive on public procurement defines the bidding procedures, the types and the exclusion, selection and award criteria that need to be met by the contracting authorities. However, the legal framework of the EU does not regulate the tenders of private purchasers. (2014/24/EU) (2014/23/EU) (2014/25/EU).

Regarding the public procurement of food, the reference directive is 2014/24/EU. It should be noted that collective catering services are excluded from the scope of actual application but enter the scope of services when the value of the contract exceeds the threshold of €750,000 (Articles 74, 75 and 76). (2014/23/EU)

This directive allows member states the option to fully exploit the evaluation criteria of qualitative and social sustainability, as long as the award of the contract is based on the quality/price criterion. However, the economic criterion turns out to be the one with greater influence and this has an effect on the identification of the most advantageous offer in terms of price or cost, which is identified through a cost-effectiveness approach evaluated in criteria such as qualitative, environmental and social aspects.

The objective we are pursuing with these recommendations is to identify other criteria that promote quality and innovation in public procurement and that allow environmental and social aspects to be included, with special reference to the protection of employment and working conditions and in favour of disadvantaged groups.

On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that the directives contemplate grounds for exclusion when they consider that an attempt is made against the free movement of competition. For this reason, when the aim is to promote the introduction of a specific type of product in public food procurement, care must be taken not to infringe Articles 34, 35 and 36 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). These articles prohibit quantitative restrictions on imports and exports between member states and measures having an equivalent effect. The preferential introduction of certain products, such as local or regional food products, is generally considered a discriminatory practice with respect to other products in the European trading area. Therefore, the principles of competition protection must be respected.

However, current legislation determines, as a general principle, the obligation of member states to adopt the appropriate measures to ensure that environmental, social and labour requirements are integrated in the tendering procedures and in the execution of the contracts (2014/24/EU)

Finally, it must be borne in mind that, apart from European regulations, economic operators must also comply with the obligations established in national legislation, collective agreements or international law. It follows that, now even more than in the past, the regulation of public contracts cannot apply the prism of cost-effectiveness in the strict sense of price competition alone. Conversely, it must also consider aspects related to environmental, social and labour protection.

**Criteria that contribute to promoting the overall sustainability of the food system**

**a) Proximity**

The origin of the raw materials of which the school canteen menu needs to comprise is the selection criterion with the greatest potential for positive impact on the sustainability of the food system, as this has a driving effect on both social and economic sustainability. Proximity, understood as a short sale and marketing circuit, delimits the number of intermediaries in the distribution chain and involves direct sales with the producer or a group of agri-food or agricultural producers or a legal entity in which the producer is the majority shareholder.

Positive impacts:


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- The producer receives a fair and reasonable price for their production
- The consumption of seasonal, fresh and nutritious products brings both environmental and health benefits
- Decrease in transport distance: decrease in economic and environmental costs
- Contribution to the maintenance of indigenous varieties and biodiversity
- Promotion of the local economy and the socio-economic development of the territory
- Consumption of foods that are part of our gastronomic culture
- Maintenance of the living territory.

**b) Locally seasonal foods**

Locally seasonal foods are those that are produced in the natural production season and consumed in the same climate zone. (MacDiarmid et al 2014). Thus, seasonal products have an environmental, health, economic and social impact depending on the regions where the products come from and where they are consumed. Therefore, seasonal produce grown outdoors and transported short distances may have less environmental impact than produce grown in greenhouses or transported long distances.
On the other hand, seasonal vegetables are characterised by their freshness, which conditions better organoleptic characteristics (taste, texture, colour, etc.), quality and prices, which, in addition, favours the preparing of menus containing healthier options.

The contracting body can include this criterion by indicating, for each season of the year, the specific foods that need to be delivered/offered.

Positive impacts:

- The consumption of seasonal, fresh and nutritious products brings both environmental and health benefits
- Reduction of the environmental impact due to production and the reduction in length of the transport route
- Contribution to the maintenance of indigenous varieties and biodiversity
- Consumption of foods that are part of our gastronomic culture
- The local economy and the socio-economic development of our territory are promoted

**c) Healthy eating**

When programming and planning the menus with regard to the frequency of consumption of the different food groups and the cooking techniques used, the criteria and recommendations of the reference food guides must be kept in mind. The aspects that need to be kept in mind are:

- Commitment by the awardee company to present to the school's management and the families or legal guardians the **monthly programming** of daily menus, organised by weekly sections. The programming must contain, the menus of at least four weeks (one month), and the food groups can be repeated with small variations with the necessary adaptations to include seasonal foods, types of preparations (colder or warmer dishes, depending on the time of year), dishes for specific festivities, etc.

The menu programming must comply with the food frequencies and cooking techniques recommended in the reference guides.

- **Adapted programming** must also be delivered for diners with special dietary needs (food intolerances or allergies and other food-related health problems that require it), as well as menu programmes adapted for ethical or religious reasons.
- The monthly menu programming must be provided in a clear and detailed manner. It may not include advertising or food brands.
- The awardee company must have the **technical sheets on the dishes** that make up the menus, with the measurement of the ingredients they contain (volume and weight) and the allergens, to present them in the event that they are requested. Likewise, the technical sheets must include information on the products used in the preparation of the menus according to the rules for labelling food products and information for consumers.


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- Menus must be designed or supervised by **professionals with accredited training in human nutrition and dietetics.**
- The amounts of the rations served must be adapted to the age and appetite of the children, so that they are adapted to their needs and, at the same time, food waste is avoided.
- Water must always be present in the meal. Tap water, coming from a public distribution network, is suitable and healthy for consumption and avoids the use of single-use containers.
- The use of salt in the preparations must be minimal and iodised salt must be used.

**d) Local gastronomy**

In school menus, the inclusion of dishes from the local cuisine must be valued as part of the cultural heritage and thus promote local gastronomy. It is essential that school menus are based on the recipes for traditional Catalan cuisine, both in terms of ingredients and preparation.

Positive impacts:

- Contribution to the maintenance of indigenous varieties and biodiversity
- Consumption of foods that are part of our gastronomic culture
- Promotion of the local economy and the socio-economic development of the territory.

**e) Differentiated quality**

The Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), regulated by Regulation (EU) 1151/2012 on the quality regimes of agricultural and food products, is the name that identifies a product originating in a specific place, a region or, in exceptional circumstances, a country, whose quality or characteristics are fundamentally or exclusively due to a particular geographical environment, with inherent natural and human factors and whose production, processing and preparation phases take place entirely in the defined geographical area.

The Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) is the name that identifies a product originating in a specific place, region or country, which has a specific quality, reputation or other characteristic that can essentially be attributed to its geographical origin, and of which at least one of its phases of production, processing or preparation takes place in the defined geographical area. The requirements set out in Regulation (EU) 1151/2012 on quality regimes for agricultural and food products must be met (DOUE L343 of 14/12/2012).

Positive impacts:

- Reduction of the environmental impact due to the reduction in length of the transport route
- Contribution to the maintenance of indigenous varieties and biodiversity
- Consumption of foods that are part of our gastronomic culture
- The local economy and the socio-economic development of our territory are promoted

**f) Sustainability of productions**

**Organic Agricultural Production**

The differentiated quality mark of organic production, also known as biological or ecological production, is a system of management and agri-food production that combines the best environmental practices with a high level of biodiversity and preservation of natural resources, as well as the application of standards strict animal welfare. Organic certification, regulated by Regulation (EU) 2018/848, guarantees that the products have been produced or processed following the rules of organic agriculture, and that they have been controlled throughout their production, preparation, packaging and marketing process.

The consumer must be able to differentiate organic products, so all packaged units must bear the EU logo and the numerical code of the control body to which the operator responsible for the organic product depends, in addition of its own brand and the specific terms of organic production.

Positive impacts:

- Reduced environmental impact
- Contribution to the maintenance of indigenous varieties and biodiversity
- Consumption of foods that are part of our gastronomic culture


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- Promotion of the local economy and the socio-economic development of the territory

**g) Waste reduction and environmental aspects**

The awardee company must have a waste reduction plan in which it defines the specific strategies it has implemented to reduce waste, such as using large-format packaging, reusable tableware (glasses, crockery, cutlery, textile, etc.) and offering tap water in the canteen in jugs, glass bottles or reusable food-use plastic, among others.

**h) Economic sustainability**

An economically sustainable food system must guarantee a fair and equitable distribution of value among all agents in the food chain. For this reason, Directive (EU) 2019/633 regulates unfair commercial practices in relations between companies in the agricultural and food supply chain with the intention of ensuring, first of all, that producers receive an adequate price for their products, so a prior contract is required that must specify the commercial relations between the producers and the buyers and establish a certain price for the products, which must, in any case, be higher than the total costs assumed by the producer, which include the costs of developing their activity, such as the cost of labour which is paid or contributed by the producer or by members of their family unit. In addition, in order to avoid the destruction of value in the food chain, each operator must pay the immediately previous operator a price equal to or higher than the cost of production of the product that has effectively been incurred or assumed by that operator.

**i) Waste**

The awardee companies must have a food waste reduction plan.

**j) Food safety**

The awardee companies must ensure compliance with the regulations relating to the hygiene of food products and food safety.

**k) SMEs**

Dividing the public procurement of school canteens into lots is a highly beneficial initiative for agri-food production companies, as it facilitates the participation of small and medium-sized local companies in the bidding processes. This division allows smaller companies, often with strong roots in the territory and a commitment to sustainability, to compete on equal terms with large companies. In addition, it must be borne in mind that each territory has its own crops and culinary traditions, which is why SMEs can contribute to enriching the gastronomic offering and in this way adapting school menus to local particularities and preferences.

Encouraging the participation of agri-food producing companies in school canteen contracts contributes to strengthening the local economy, reducing the carbon footprint associated with food transport and guaranteeing food based on fresh and quality products. Thus, the division into lots not only promotes competitiveness and transparency in public procurement, but also promotes the sustainable development of rural communities.

In order to encourage the participation of agri-food SMEs in public procurement, the number of food or service suppliers that are SMEs should be assessed. To accredit this criterion, the bidding company must present a list of suppliers.

**l) Social and territorial impact**

a) Incorporation of products from territorial rooting projects: all those where there are territorial marks recognised and approved by the representative bodies of local administrations (City Councils, County Councils or other local entities of public initiative) are considered to be projects with territorial roots. The intention is to incentivise the bidding companies to buy products within the framework of territorial rooting projects to favour short value chains contributing to improve the social sustainability of these, since they have a very positive impact on the rooting of the population in the


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territory and contribute to ensure generational succession. The products from territorial rooting projects must be linked to some association or label.

b) Incorporation of products from producer associations: the aim is to encourage bidding companies to buy products directly from producers or groups of producers, which include Producer Organisations and their associations, agricultural cooperatives and Agricultural Processing Companies (SATs). The reduction in the number of intermediaries favours equitable relations in the food chain, reduces the environmental impact of the provision and favours the consumption of fresh products.

c) Incorporation of products from projects with a social impact: this brings benefits both for companies and for society in general, since they contribute to improving the quality of life of people in a situation of vulnerability or with special needs, they help to reinforce the ethical values of the company and to improve the their corporate reputation, foster diversity and innovation, and contribute to local economic development.

d) Incorporation of products from shared infrastructure elements (workshops, slaughterhouses of small capacity and infrastructures for the distribution and joint marketing of producers), since these infrastructure elements favour cooperation between the agents of the food chain and promote short distribution chains and consequently contribute to improving social sustainability. They also generate a positive impact on the population's rooting in the territory and ensure generational succession.

**m) Contribution to the school's educational project**

The awardee company can offer educational activities linked to food, sustainability, eating habits, the importance of local food consumption, etc. These actions must be aligned with the educational project of the school and it must be determined that the educational proposal by the company includes:

a) the organisation of visits or other strategies to give visibility to the food producers who provide the food for the preparation of school menus,
b) communicative and teaching resources for the visualisation of farms and their agroecosystems and, for traditional recipes,
c) content related to:
    - the types of local crops and their seasonality
    - the crops of traditional indigenous varieties
    - traditional agricultural knowledge
    - knowledge of the rural area, its needs and the people who work the land
    - the knowledge of our ethno-agro-ecosystems
    - actions for waste management, such as proper separation, composting projects at the school to offer to the local farmers, or the transporting of properly-separated organic rubbish to farmers' composters so they can use it, etc.

**n) Right to culturally appropriate food**

Schools, through their canteens, represent an opportunity to link and reaffirm the diversity of the territory's cultures. Food is an ideal, but seldom used, tool to work on rooting and inclusiveness in schools, both for children and their families.

Public schools and the school canteen have an added socialising potential thanks to the possibilities offered by the relationship between children, families, the canteen, teaching staff and the food spaces in the neighbourhood. In this regard, menus can be designed and prepared that cater to the cultural and food diversity of the students and, in addition, carry out educational and fun activities to value food diversity in the canteen, in the classroom, during leisure time or on excursions. For example: exchanging, preparing and representing recipes or menus proposed by the students, together with the knowledge and meanings of what they involve.


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### 3.4 PB - Digital and educational tools. APP and the educational game (CERTH, Greece)

Digital tools play a crucial role in fostering sustainable dietary changes, particularly in promoting adherence to the Mediterranean Diet. Examples of such tools include mobile health applications, wearable nutrition trackers, and gamified educational platforms, which provide users with personalized guidance and interactive learning experiences to encourage healthier eating habits. As part of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY project, CERTH, in collaboration with project partners, has developed an integrated digital ecosystem aimed at supporting families in adopting healthier eating habits. This ecosystem comprises the SWITCHtoHEALTHY App and the Digitami educational game, both designed to encourage informed food choices and active engagement in nutrition education.

The SWITCHtoHEALTHY App is an AI-driven platform that personalizes meal recommendations for adults and children, considering individual dietary preferences, nutritional guidelines, and school meal plans. By offering tailored meal plans, generated based on individual dietary preferences, physical characteristics, and expert-validated nutritional guidelines, it simplifies decision-making for families and reinforces the benefits of the Mediterranean Diet. The app also incorporates educational content, providing users with insights into nutrition, sustainable food choices, and the health advantages of a Mediterranean dietary pattern.

Complementing the app, the Digitami educational game is a "life simulation" experience designed to instil healthy eating habits in children. Through interactive gameplay, children care for a virtual character whose well-being depends on balanced nutrition and regular physical activity. For example, they must select nutritious meals and engage in exercise routines to maintain the character's health, reinforcing real-world dietary and activity habits in a fun and engaging manner. This engaging approach enhances learning and promotes positive dietary behaviours from an early age.

In the SWITCHtoHEALTHY pilot case, where a total of 250 families from Spain and Turkey were involved and monitored for three months, all families in the digital tool groups (S2H App) logged in and engaged with the content. However, as the study progressed, usability – as it was self-reported by the users – dropped, with 72.7% of families showing low usage (less than once a week). The primary reasons for this decline in engagement included loss of interest, difficulty in maintaining regular use, and perceived lack of time. Only 9% of families reported high usage (more than once a week). Similarly, the users reported that the interactive game within the app was used sparingly by children, with 88% of them reporting low or no use.

The results of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY pilot study indicate that while digital tools such as the SWITCHtoHEALTHY App and the Digitami educational game can serve as valuable instruments for promoting healthier eating habits, their effectiveness in sustaining long-term engagement remains limited. Despite initial interest, user engagement was reported to drop significantly over time, with most families and children reporting low usage rates. This suggests that while apps and gamified platforms provide essential educational content and personalized guidance, they are not sufficient on their own to ensure consistent participation.

One of the key challenges observed was the difficulty in maintaining user interest and motivation. Families often cited lack of time and difficulty in integrating digital tools into their daily routines as primary barriers. Similarly, children showed minimal engagement with the interactive game, highlighting the need for additional motivational strategies. To enhance the impact of such digital interventions, complementary engagement mechanisms should be explored.

- Incentive-based approaches, such as rewards for consistent participation, virtual badges, or even tangible benefits like discounts on healthy food products, could encourage more sustained use.
- Additionally, incorporating social elements—such as group discussions, peer challenges, or family-based competitions—could foster a sense of community and shared progress, making the experience more engaging and meaningful. Personalized coaching or real-time feedback from nutrition experts could also enhance the perceived value of these tools, ensuring that users feel supported in their journey towards healthier eating.


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Ultimately, digital tools have the potential to be powerful enablers of dietary change, but they must be integrated into a broader, multifaceted strategy that includes social support and real-world engagement to maximize their long-term effectiveness.

## 3.5 PB – Effective Family Nutrition Education Programs (EURECAT, Spain)

**Executive Summary**

Family Nutrition Education Programs (FNEPs) are crucial for improving health and well-being, particularly for underserved communities facing food insecurity, limited access to healthcare, and poor dietary habits. These programs educate families about making healthier food choices, understanding nutrition labels, preparing balanced meals, and adopting sustainable eating habits. The success of these programs is enhanced by evidence-based practices, community engagement, and accessible resources. This policy brief outlines the importance of FNEPs, the key components of successful programs, and policy recommendations for enhancing their impact, highlighting the preliminary results of the multicomponent family-based intervention carried out within the framework of the EU-funded SWITCHtoHEALTHY project (10.3030/101060483).

**Key Components of Successful Family Nutrition Education Programs**

1. **Community-Centered approach**
   Successful FNEPs prioritize the community's unique needs, culture, and resources. Tailoring programs to local contexts increases participant engagement and ensures relevance. This includes integrating local food preferences, dietary habits, and traditional cooking methods.

2. **Interactive and practical learning**
   To ensure lasting behavioural change, programs should incorporate hands-on activities such as cooking demonstrations, grocery store tours, and meal planning exercises. These interactive components empower families to apply the information directly in their homes.

3. **Focus on sustainability**
   Teaching families how to prepare nutritious, budget-friendly meals is crucial. By emphasizing budget-conscious cooking, resourceful food shopping, and waste reduction, families can maintain healthy habits in the long term, even amid financial constraints.

4. **Inclusive education methods**
   Programs should engage all members of the family, from parents and caregivers to children. Involving children in nutrition education encourages them to adopt healthy eating habits from an early age, while adults benefit from practical advice on overcoming everyday challenges.

5. **Collaboration with local partners**
   Partnering with local healthcare providers, schools, community centers, and food pantries creates a support network for families. These collaborations provide access to additional resources, including health services, cooking equipment, and food assistance programs.

6. **Use of technology**
   Digital platforms such as mobile apps, online workshops, and virtual support groups can complement face-to-face learning, making nutrition education more accessible. These tools offer resources like meal plans, recipes, grocery shopping guides, and food tracking tools to maintain engagement.

**Preliminary Results from the SWITCHtoHEALTHY multicomponent family-based nutritional intervention**

The SWITCHtoHEALTHY project aimed to implement a multicomponent family intervention to improve nutritional habits and health outcomes across different Mediterranean countries. This intervention


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emphasized the role of the family in fostering sustainable changes toward healthier eating habits by adhering to the Mediterranean Diet (MD). The program employed a holistic family-based approach combining multiple strategies to engage family members of all ages—adults, adolescents, and children.

**Three intervention components:**

1. **Digital Interactive Tools**
   The SWITCHtoHEALTHY App was designed to support parents in preparing weekly healthier dietary plans for all family members. The app provided personalized meal plans, shopping lists, and recipes, enabling families to adopt a Mediterranean-style diet. It also tracked progress and offered reminders, making it easier for families to stay on track. Additionally, the App included a "life simulation" educational game to increase engagement of the families.

2. **Hands-On Educational Materials and Activities**
   To engage adolescents, the intervention included activities and educational materials aimed at increasing knowledge and motivation surrounding healthy and sustainable food habits. These activities provided adolescents with practical, actionable tips for making healthier food choices, including ways to incorporate plant-based foods and increase MD foods intake.

3. **Healthy and Sustainable Plant-Based Snacks**
   The intervention introduced healthier, plant-based snacks as alternatives to less nutritious options, encouraging families to incorporate these snacks into their children's dietary plans. The composition of the new food products was based on combinations of local and traditional vegetables, fruits, legumes, seeds and nuts as main ingredients, which are rich in health-promoting bioactive compounds. This aspect of the program targeted improving in-between meal choices, reinforcing the importance of sustainable, nutrient-dense snacks to promote overall health.

**Preliminary results of the multicenter study:**

A multicenter study was conducted across two Mediterranean countries, Spain and Türkiye, to evaluate the effects of a 3-month intervention. The intervention aimed to increase adherence to the Mediterranean Diet (MD) pattern by combining the digital interactive tools, the hands-on educational material, and the sustainable, healthy plant-based snacks. A total of **250 families** from both countries participated, meeting the following eligibility criteria:

> *One child under 12 years and one adolescent aged 12 or older (with an overall age range of 3 to 17 years).*
>
> *All family members lived in the same household.*
>
> *Families had access to a mobile phone, tablet, or computer with internet access.*

The countries of Spain and Türkiye were selected for the study due to their geographical location in the Mediterranean region and the concerning trends of malnutrition and the declining adherence to the MD in these areas. Preliminary results show the following:

- **Adherence to the Mediterranean Diet:** Families demonstrated a significant improvement in adherence to the MD, with higher proportion of families reporting greater incorporation of MD components, such as olive oil, whole grains, pulses, nuts and fruits and vegetables particularly in the groups using a combination of the digital interactive tools and the healthy snacks.
- **Family engagement:** Both parents and children were actively involved at the beginning of the intervention, with parents showing increased motivation to adopt sustainable eating habits.


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However, family engagement decreased as the study progressed due to discontinuity in the use of educational tools and contents.

- **Improved dietary habits:** The introduction of healthy plant-based snacks showed a reduction in the consumption of processed and sugary snacks, with families reporting a shift toward more sustainable food choices.
- **Increased family cohesion:** The intervention strengthened family dynamics, with families noting more shared meal preparation and increased communication about food choices and nutrition.

**Barriers to Program adherence and compliance:**

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges arose during the implementation of the interventions, particularly in terms of engagement and adherence:

1. **Digital Interactive Tools Usage**:

   Initially, all families in the digital tool groups (S2H App) logged in and engaged with the content. However, as the study progressed, usability dropped, with 72.7% of families showing low usage (less than once a week). The primary reasons for this decline in engagement included loss of interest, difficulty in maintaining regular use, and perceived lack of time. Only 9% of families showed high usage (more than once a week). Similarly, the interactive game within the app was used sparingly by children, with 88% of them reporting low or no use.

2. **Adolescents' participation in Educational Activities**:

   The educational and empowerment activities for adolescents, which were designed to be carried out at home or with expert researchers, had mixed results. Some adolescents engaged enthusiastically, particularly in activities like creating homemade yogurt or preparing sustainable recipes. The “Mediterranean tasting and outdoor picnic” and “Make your own nutritious smoothie” workshops had high participation rates. However, a significant portion of adolescents (26.6% on average) struggled with consistent participation at home, citing academic workload, exams, and extracurricular activities as major barriers to engagement.

3. **Acceptance of Healthy and Sustainable Snacks**:

   Most children initially showed interest in the plant-based snacks offered as part of the intervention. However, adherence dropped during the course of the study, with parents in Spain and Türkiye reporting varying levels of acceptance. In Spain, blended fruit and vegetable juices based on chickpeas and butternut squash were disliked due to taste, while fruit, nuts, and yogurt pouches were well-received. In Türkiye, snack bars with ingredients like dates, orange powder, and dried mulberries were more liked, but others were considered dry and difficult to chew. The inclusion of chocolate coatings was suggested by parents as a potential improvement. By the end of the study, children’s compliance with snack intake averaged 62%.

4. **Challenges with food consumption data**:

   Collecting accurate data on food consumption proved difficult, as many parents found it time-consuming to weigh and record food quantities and prices. This resulted in incomplete or partial data collection from some families.

**Nutritionists' perspective on the SWITCHtoHEALTHY intervention:**

Nutritionists involved in the SWITCHtoHEALTHY study highlighted several strengths and areas for improvement in the intervention design.


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**STRENGHTS**

From the nutritionists' point of view, the main strength of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY intervention was its **holistic family-based approach**, which combined interactive tools, snack products, and methodologies aimed at reinforcing healthy dietary habits. By involving all family members, the intervention fostered joint efforts and collaboration among family members to drive dietary changes. This approach is innovative compared to other interventions that target specific age groups individually. Moreover, the different components of the intervention empowered each family member to play a role in effecting behavioural changes.

**AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

1. **Enhanced recruitment methods:**

   Nutritionists suggested that participant recruitment could be improved by involving **healthcare professionals**, such as paediatricians and family doctors, to help raise awareness and recruit more families. These professionals can play a key role in referring families to the program and increasing engagement from the outset.

2. **Better monitoring and follow-up:**

   Continuous engagement with families was identified as a challenge. Nutritionists recommended **developing more effective monitoring techniques** and establishing more direct tracking methods, such as weekly check-ins via phone messages or participatory challenges on food topics. Additionally, involving parents and children in creating meal plans and recipes would promote a greater sense of ownership and participation.

3. **Social engagement for adolescents:**

   Nutritionists also highlighted the need for **group talks** and activities to create a sense of **community and peer support** among adolescents. These could help increase their motivation and engagement in the program, fostering a more positive experience.

4. **Addressing socioeconomic barriers:**

   The nutritionists emphasized that socioeconomic factors, such as lower family incomes, might limit access to certain MD products like virgin olive oil. To address this, they proposed **delivering key Mediterranean ingredients** as part of the intervention to ensure all families, regardless of socioeconomic status, have equal access to these essential foods.

**Policy recommendations for Family Nutrition Education Programs (FNEPs)**

1. **Increase Funding for FNEPs**
   Policymakers should prioritize increasing funding for FNEPs, particularly in underserved areas. Local, state, and federal governments should allocate resources to support the infrastructure necessary for effective programming, including staff training, educational materials, and program evaluation.

2. **Support Culturally Competent Programs**
   Nutrition education programs must be adapted to meet the cultural needs of the community. Policymakers should encourage the development of culturally competent curricula and offer training for educators to ensure inclusivity.

3. **Leverage Technology and Media Outreach**
   Investment in digital resources and platforms can enhance the reach and effectiveness of nutrition


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education programs. Digital tools, including mobile apps, online courses, and social media engagement, can support families in adopting and maintaining healthier habits.

4. **Encourage Involvement of Healthcare Professionals**
   Policymakers should encourage collaborations between family nutrition education programs and healthcare professionals (e.g., pediatricians, family doctors) to facilitate participant recruitment, retention, and engagement.

5. **Ensure Equal Access to Mediterranean Foods**
   Given socioeconomic disparities, it is essential that interventions address access to healthy foods. Providing families with essential ingredients such as olive oil and whole grains could remove barriers to adherence to MD.

**Conclusion**

Effective FNEPs hold the potential to create lasting changes in dietary habits and improve overall health outcomes for families. By learning from the successes and challenges of projects like SWITCHtoHEALTHY, policymakers and practitioners can continue to refine and improve these programs, making them more engaging, inclusive, and sustainable for all families.





*Figure 7: Intervention Study in Spain ad Turkey*

## 3.6 PB - Understanding behavioural changes (CREDA, Spain)

**Key Findings and Preliminary Results**

The SWITCHtoHEALTHY project assessed the effectiveness of a structured, family-based intervention to improve adherence to the Mediterranean diet (AMD) among families in both Spain and Turkey. Results indicated noticeable behavioral changes in dietary habits, lifestyle choices, and nutritional awareness among the three subsamples involucrate within the study (parents, adolescents, and children). The pre-assessment step revealed key barriers to MD adherence, including limited knowledge, availability of healthy food options, and ingrained eating habits. In contrast, post-assessment findings showed some marked improvements, especially among individuals with lower baseline adherence to MD, who had the most substantial dietary changes.


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Main outcomes revealed that Spanish adolescents displayed the important individual progress, specifically in the adoption of healthier snacking habits and meal planning, while Turkish participants, across all demographics (parents, adolescents, and children), exhibited consistent improvements in lifestyle adherence and nutrition knowledge. The implemented interventions within the study influenced not only individual participants but also the decision making of the family as a whole when it comes to some aspects like: food purchases and meal preparation…etc. However, the specific effects of the interventions are varying: Spanish adolescents responded better to the app-based intervention, while Turkish participants showed a more benefit from the educational and snack-based approaches.

**Challenges in data management, cleaning, and analysis**

Several obstacles were present within the data collection and analysis process where, they impacted the overall effectiveness of the study:

1. **Difficulties of participants' recruitment**: One of the main challenges for the present study was the recruitment of families, specifically to ensure their active participation, keeping them engaged within the whole study, and trying to minimize the dropout rates at each step. Therefore, higher efforts need to be done in order to enhance the involvement of the families throughout the intervention.
2. **Data cleaning and management**: Since dropout rates was high and due to the inconsistencies in reporting the data, cleaning the dataset was a difficult task and consumes a lot of time. Therefore, starting the data collection as early as possible within the project timeline would allow for better resolution of unexpected challenges and for better data management especially if some software like Qualtrics for example are used to collect participant's responses.
3. **Cultural and contextual variations**: The participants' dietary habits and responses toward the interventions in Spain and Turkey are quite different and needs careful comparisons across country and analyses.
4. **Limited Sample for Statistical Significance**: Due to the fact of conducting the study in only two countries (Spain and Turkey) instead of three -morocco being the missing one- along with a high drop-out, we ended with a limited number of observations at each time point. This reduced the statistical power of the estimated regression models, affecting the generalizability of the findings.

**Economic and policy perspectives on SWITCHtoHEALTHY data**

From an economic and policy perspective, the results emphasize the necessity of structures that:

1. Support the sustainable food consumption habits by making some economic incentives and subsidies.
2. Promote the affordability and accessibility of MD-friendly food products as much as possible.
3. Encourage targeted interventions for populations with lower AMD adherence through tailored policy measures.
4. Address socio-economic disparities influencing dietary behaviors by integrating dietary policies with broader social programs.
5. Incorporate behavioral economic insights into public health strategies in order to reinforce the long-term dietary adherence.

**Recommendations for Improving Future Intervention Studies**


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1. **Enhanced Recruitment Strategies**: Future intervention studies should adopt more proactive recruitment methodologies, that implement more persons/researchers ensuring a more representative, motivated and also engaged participants.
2. **Participant Incentives and Support**: Providing ongoing incentives, such as food vouchers, gamified rewards, or community-based engagement activities, can sustain interest and motivation throughout the study. Stronger outreach initiatives and better incentives for participation can enhance adherence and reduce dropout rates.
3. **Earlier Data Collection and Preparation**: Data collection should commence as soon as the intervention materials and tools are finalized. This would allow sufficient time for data cleaning, management, and necessary adjustments to improve study execution.
4. **Tailored Interventions**: Taken into consideration the cultural and demographic differences existing between the study pilots. Moreover, it's recommended to avoid the one-size-fits-all approach because it is less effective than interventions and strategies that allow for regional dietary preferences in addition to behavioral driver's consideration. Furthermore, it is recommended to go through studies with longer intervention period (more than 3 months), in order to increase reliability and possibility of findings extrapolation.
5. **Focus on sustained behavioral changes**: Future studies should implement follow-up phases beyond the initial intervention period in order to assess long-term adherence and identify factors that influence sustained dietary improvements.

**Policy Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY project, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

1. **Institutional support for MD promotion**: Governments and health organizations should integrate MD promotion into national dietary guidelines and school curricula.
2. **Financial and structural incentives**: Policies should encourage food producers and retailers to enhance the availability and affordability of Mediterranean diet-compatible foods.
3. **Sustained behavioral interventions**: Public health campaigns should incorporate digital tools and community-based educational programs to reinforce long-term adherence to AMD.
4. **Targeted support for low-adherence populations**: Special focus should be given to populations with historically lower AMD adherence, ensuring that intervention strategies are tailored to their specific barriers and needs.
5. **Cross-cultural adaptation in intervention design**: Policy frameworks should emphasize culturally sensitive program designs that acknowledge diverse dietary traditions and socio-economic factors.

**Conclusion**

The SWITCHtoHEALTHY project emphasizes how important organized interventions are for encouraging families to adopt healthier eating and behavioral patterns. The study indicates that well-designed interventions can lead to significant improvements in dietary patterns, especially if they engage different sample demographics like parents, adolescents, and children collectively. The study's Pre- and post-assessment analyses confirmed that targeted intervention strategies are effective in reshaping family meal planning, food purchasing decisions, and nutritional knowledge. The findings indicate that engaging parents, adolescents, and children collectively fosters a more supportive environment for behavioural transformations. However, for such initiatives to be scalable and sustainable, improvements in recruitment,


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participant engagement, data management, intervention customization, and increasing the intervention implementation period are necessary in addition to a future effort that should prioritize behavioural drivers, motivation mechanisms. Policymakers should integrate these findings into broader public health strategies to ensure effective and culturally adaptive dietary promotion efforts. Future programs must strategically allocate resources to maximize impact, particularly among groups with lower baseline adherence, to achieve long-term improvements in public health nutrition.


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## 4. Conclusions

This document provides a comprehensive, evidence-based policy framework to promote the Mediterranean Diet through research-driven strategies and policy instruments. By leveraging scientific data, best practices, and innovative incentive mechanisms, it equips policymakers with actionable tools to enhance adherence to the Mediterranean Diet. The establishment of the Permanent Observatory ensures ongoing knowledge exchange and stakeholder collaboration, reinforcing the long-term impact of these initiatives. Ultimately, this policy mix represents a significant step toward fostering healthier and more sustainable food behaviors across Mediterranean countries.


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## ANNEX: Focus on specific initiatives

### 1. EURECAT

Currently, because of the promotion of industrialized and unhealthy food products, the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables is decreasing, mainly in children and young people. It has been shown that the high consumption of ultra-processed foods increases the risk of developing chronic noncommunicable diseases in adulthood. Among other things, fruits and vegetables are associated with lower mortality rates and a lower risk of suffering from diseases like cancer, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes, neurodegenerative diseases, hypertension, etc.

In Spain, the Association for the Promotion of the Consumption of Fruits and Vegetables “5 a day” is a national, non-profit association that since 2000 has promoted not only the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables (as part of the Mediterranean diet), but also the practice of physical activity and a healthy lifestyle. The organization carries out a variety of communication, training, information, promotional, and international activities to spread the message "consume at least five daily servings of fresh fruit and vegetables, whole rather than blended, varied and seasonal, and preferably local, all within the framework of a healthy diet and active lifestyle".

The different educational projects aim to ensure that children:

- Become aware of consuming five daily servings of fruit.
- Learn about the food pyramid from a practical perspective: the composition of balanced menus based on the Mediterranean diet.
- Recognize fresh foods and the benefits of seasonal and local products.
- Distinguish the families of fruits and vegetables and be able to differentiate their properties.
- Become aware of the importance of avoiding food waste.

### 2. CEEBA

The EU funded ENPI CBC MED MedDiet project can be seen as a shining example due to its significant accomplishments in introducing the MedDiet concept to a wide audience in Egypt, including educators, schools, government officials, and the general populace.

One of the project's notable achievements was its systematic engagement of crucial stakeholders, such as teachers and representatives from family and health centres, by providing them with comprehensive training and high-quality instructional materials. This enabled them to effectively facilitate various activities aimed at educating and promoting the Mediterranean Diet to students and families.

The MedDiet also undertook several other noteworthy initiatives, which are not discussed here to maintain the brevity of this report.

By spreading knowledge about the benefits of the MD, the project aims at providing consumers with the opportunity to understand in an easy way how important is a healthy alimentary regime and how important is to preserve healthy traditions, also in terms of food. Young people seem to be particularly exposed to global trends in terms of diet and habits and for this reason the project has a special focus on them, in particular to pupils from primary and secondary schools.

Schools and Local Authorities play an important role as main actors in education. Med- Diet aims at providing schools and local Authorities with tools and skills to human re- sources (teachers, school directors and officers) to make them to implement nutrition education initiatives on MD addressed to pupils and other kind other final beneficiaries.

*MedDiet for local authorities*

Consumers seem to be particularly exposed to global trends in terms of diet and habits and for this reason the project has a special focus on them. A Technical Committee was established for defining a shared


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Mediterranean Knowledge System of MD. Composed by experts in food and nutrition, education, pedagogy, psychology, anthropology and governmental technicians, the Committee designed useful Guidelines, tools and supporting material to spread and strengthen the knowledge about MD. These common schemes and guidelines were established and adopted by all partners to be applied to each national context of the project.

Mediterranean Knowledge System for Local Authorities includes:
List of products and food of the MD • List of good practices/principles of the MD • Digital library of studies about health benefits of the MD • Tool-kit of MD for promotional activities. In particular, the tool-kit is composed by:

Guidelines about the organization of events for the promotion of MD • Communication and promotional instruments (gadgets, brochures)

Steps taken
Firstly, a training for trainers' activity was implemented to allow staffs of local Authorities to acquire knowledge and competences on how to implement initiatives promoting MD in their territories. At this purpose, the shared Mediterranean Knowledge System of MD and its tools represented the main source for acquiring knowledge and competences during the courses.

Secondly, by the cooperation of the trained promoters of local Authorities, pilot projects were implemented in local Authorities in order to involve the highest number of consumers.

Workshops on "MedDiet taste"

The workshop program activities were for all audiences and were aimed at making participants experience the MD through tasting, preparing, and dialoguing. Thus, practical sessions and active methodology were designed to get to know the foods of the MD, their sensory aspects, history and curiosities, nutrition facts and culinary uses.

Cooking courses

The aim of the courses was to promote knowledge and skills to the participants in order to know how to choose foods of the MD. Two types of cooking courses were available:

Cooking courses for homemakers • Cooking courses for the whole family Practical sessions and active methodology were designed to enjoy and acquire knowledge about the different food groups of the MD.

Mediterranean Diet Competition Ideas

The competition ideas were games organised for the family, to work together to achieve a common goal, making each victory everyone's accomplishment and to learn about MD principles.

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Local events

Local gatherings were a critical com- ponent of the Mediterranean basin and the MD identity. By organizing local event and involving whole com- munities, citizens were educated and encouraged to acquire awareness about the benefits of the MD.

Lessons learnt and outcomes

The awareness campaigns for consumers on values and benefits of the MD have all achieved great success in terms of participation, mostly due to the ability to involve the local administrations and to their full adherence to the initiatives promoted by project partners. More than 509 officers from local Authorities were involved in training courses and 27.035 tool-kits were provided.

Based on the knowledge acquired and the informative material provided, local Authorities' officers have collaborated with project partners to the realization of more than 43 pilot projects involving more than 127.300 consumers.

According to specific needs of each local authority and of each project Country, each pilot project organised experiential and meaningful learning activities: taste work- shops, cooking courses, competition ideas on MedDiet and local events.

By the development and the spread of a Mediterranean Knowledge System of MD, at the end of the project many local Authorities are now equipped with tools and human resources capable to implement promotional initiatives on MD addressed to consumers.

The clearest result of the initiatives promoted by local Authorities is the substantial awareness by the same Authorities of the MD value as pivotal consolidation tool of our most common cultural and food traditions, as precious tool to promote citizen awareness on topics related to nutrition and healthy lifestyle and, lastly, as strategic and competitive factor to promote and support the local development. In this view, many of involved administrations showed interest to permanently incorporate MD in their public agenda and to include MD in the local development policies.

*MedDiet for schools*
The Project has increased the awareness of pupils of primary and secondary schools about the benefits of the MD by reinforcing the capacity of educators, teachers and school directors to implement nutrition education activities in schools.

The Technical Committee, composed by experts in food and nutrition, education, pedagogy, psychology, anthropology and governmental technicians, designed useful Guidelines, tools and supporting material to spread and strengthen the knowledge about MD.

Mediterranean Knowledge System of MD for Schools includes:
List of products and food of the MD • List of good practices / principles of the MD • Digital library of studies about health benefits of the MD for education activities • Tool- kit of MD for education activities

In particular, the tool-kit is composed by:
Guidelines for the alimentary education for schools • Communication and promotional instruments (e.g. gadgets, brochures) • Didactical supports for schools

Steps taken
Firstly, a training for trainers' activity was implemented to allow directors and teach- ers of schools to acquire knowledge and competences concerning how to promote nutrition education initiatives promoting MD in


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schools. The shared Mediterranean Knowledge System of MD and its tools have represented the main source for acquiring knowledge and competences during the courses.

Secondly, by the cooperation of trained directors and teachers, pilot projects were implemented in primary and secondary schools in order to involve the highest number of students.

Laboratory on Mediterranean taste
The Taste Laboratory was an experiential and meaningful learning activity with the aim at experiencing the MD through the senses; experimentation through the senses and learning through emotions.

Guided tours to farms and Companies

Guided tours were organised to encourage school children and their families to revive this diet's local variation at home. The objective was achieved through a one-day visit to a farm, food pro- cessing plant, local city market or food establishment. Since farms are right at the beginning of the food supply chain, children got an opportunity to learn more about the MD's most common ingredients – the origins of its taste.

Teaching gardens in school
The main objectives of this activity was to help students to understand how food is grown, to provide students with hands on opportunities to plant a garden, ultimately to teach students on how to use fresh produce and to encourage healthy eating through the first step of plant-based food production: planting.

Competitive ideas on Mediterranean diet
Teamwork was a very effective pedagogical resource as it promotes cooperation, positive interdependence, and social learning. Students worked together to achieve a common goal, and each victory was a triumph for all of them.

Pilot initiatives on meals and school canteens

Thinking that a major part of children has their main meal of the day at school five days a week, school canteens constituted one of the most effective areas to promote healthy lifestyle in children and adolescents.

Many meals and school canteens have been modified integrating health principles

Lessons learnt and outcomes

Promotion and awareness activities for pupils from primary and secondary schools on values and benefits of MD have achieved great success.

Training activities for school operators, aimed at favouring the acquisition of tools, of knowledge and skills useful for the realisation of the training activities for pupils, in- volved more than 210 schools' directors and 1.282 teachers. During training courses for school operators, 6.500 teaching materials have been provided to school operators. Based on the knowledge acquired and the teaching materials provided, school operators collaborated with project partners to the realization of more than 118 pilot projects. 6.537 tools included in the MD tool-kit have been used and distributed to pupils during all the activities.

According to specific needs of each school and of each project Country, each pilot project have concerned one of the following activities: MD taste laboratory, farms and factories visits, school vegetables gardens, competitions ideas on MD and MD school canteens check-up.

Pupils involved in these initiatives were more than 6.861.


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By the development and the spread of a Mediterranean Knowledge System of MD, at the end of the project many schools are now equipped with tools and human re- sources (teachers and school directors) capable to implement nutrition education initiatives on MD addressed to pupils.

In addition, many of the involved schools showed real interest to permanently incorporate teaching modules on MD within teaching programs and to modify school can- teens integrating health principles of MD.

### 3. CNTA and CREDA

The Mediterranean Diet Foundation (FDM_Fundación Dieta Mediterranea) was created in 1996, by the Association for the Development of the Mediterranean Diet, to highlight the fundamental value that the Mediterranean Diet (MD) and its products represent for Spanish food and its industry.

It promotes the values of the MD, their products and the healthy lifestyle that represents, which is both socially feasible and environmentally friendly. Based in Barcelona, it stands out for being the main institution that boosted the declaration of MD as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO (2010). It was presented jointly by 4 governments: Spain, Greece, Italy and Morocco.

Also promotes the collaboration with other institutions, research centres, universities, companies, producers, and entities both nationally and internationally.

FDM is sponsored by Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Government of Spain), jointly with many others institutions and food companies.

Activities

- The FDM periodically publishes a traditional Pyramid of MD which has been updated to be adapted to the current lifestyle.
- Mediterranean diet recipes browser and meal plans
- It also organizes Seminars and Workshops to boost the Food transition towards sustainability.
- Fundación Dieta Mediterranea weekly menus

Scientific research: one of the main activities of the FDM is the dissemination of scientific findings in the field of Mediterranean Food. The foundation does not fund the research but it has awarded and supported it, establishing an International Observatory that allows its monitoring all over the world.

One of their more visual activities is a database that is actualized with weekly menus https://dietamediterranea.com/menus/ with some recipes that are developed and linked to each menu. It's open access to all population but theirs is a lack of knowledge of this tool. All their menus have been elaborated following premises in order to make Mediterranean diet easy and using seasonal products.

One of their important dissemination activities took place in March 2023, as Stakeholder of Sistemas Alimetarios Globales. An International Meeting that took place in Barcelona around four main pillars of debate: global food system and European Green Deal; how to give added value to our products and our brands; economic and political situation; and culture, training, consumption habits and gastronomy. The Mediterranean Diet and its lifestyle where an important issue remarking the need of a better model of sustainability in eating, that Mediterranean Diet Stands for. Although this event is very important, there's a need to disseminate the information with citizens and reaching al population.

### 4. DACC

The rural world has a fundamental role in our food, as it is where the raw materials are produced and where the majority of the foods that arrive at our table are elaborated. It is a heritage of our country, which it is necessary to make known and appraise. To bring it closer to children, Cúpula Gustum offers educational material that is complete and adaptable to different school realities. It is addressed mainly to primary education pupils and consists of the following didactic resources:


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The Cúpula Gustum:

The Cúpula Gustum is an inflatable dome that allows immersion in a visual 360º experience, providing knowledge of how, who, and where the main foods that we have daily on our table are produced, such as milk, meat, rice, fruit, and vegetables. In particular, the proposal includes 14 thematic capsules of approximately 5 minutes each in duration, with an introductory capsule that sets the context for the audience. Between 4 or 5 capsules are projected per session. The projection is managed by one person, who presents the material and intervenes according to the needs of the audience.

The Collective Games:

To go deeper into the subject matter, the collective games offer a series of activities and games in which the children work in groups, around tables, and maps, interpreting, analyzing, and discussing various problems. The activities also promote oral interaction in both Catalan and English. Designed for teachers to lead easily, these activities include explanations and materials that accompany them. The games can be organized simultaneously when the Dome is installed, either in the courtyard or in the classrooms.

The Didactic Guide:

The Didactic Guide includes proposals for learning activities that can be conducted inside and outside of the classroom. These can be used as part of a transversal project or as specific activities to deepen the subject matter.

This educational project is led by the Association Leader de Ponent and used by all the Groups of Local Action of Catalonia—groups funded by the Department d'Acció Climàtica, Alimentació i Agenda Rural (DACC) and the FEADER.

The prime objective of the Cúpula Gustum project is to give value to the agricultural products produced in the territory. The project emphasizes the importance of these products beyond their organoleptic quality, explaining the connection between the product and the landscape, economy, culture, and traditions of the territory. The climatic and cultural characteristics of each region determine its agricultural productions and, consequently, its elaborations and eating habits.

**5. BUU**

Considering the internet and literature research across the country, it was seen that the best dissemination activity carried out in the last 10 years, focusing only on the Mediterranean diet was the promotional activities carried out within the scope of the SWITCHtoHEALTHY (S2H) project. In the project, the food ingredients included in the Mediterranean diet in the country are listed(Task 1.1.), the society's reasons (drivers) and difficulties (barriers) in implementing the Mediterranean diet are investigated (Task 1.2.), and face-to-face focus group studies reveal the importance and usability of the Mediterranean diet in the society (Task 1.3.).Through survey studies conducted on families, 201 families were reached and research was conducted on their knowledge awareness level on Mediterranean nutrition and their predisposition to Mediterranean nutrition. In focus group studies, families were informed about Mediterranean dietary habits, physical activity, and the importance of eating together as a family. Studies were conducted with parents about the Mediterranean nutrition food pyramid and the general nutritional routines of children were tried to be determined. 50 families were reached through focus group studies.9 different types of fruit bars were produced to lead students to follow this diet and to popularize the Mediterranean diet. Bursa Uludağ University project team participated in domestic and international promotional activities to promote the S2H project and popularize Mediterranean nutrition. A project dissemination meeting was held for academicians, parents and students at the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Belgrade, Serbia. A project promotion and Mediterranean nutrition dissemination meeting was held at İzmir Ege University Çeşme Tourism Faculty.


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Meetings were held at Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University, attended by academicians and parents, regarding the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet and the positive and negative factors affecting the society's adaptation to the Mediterranean diet. An S2H dissemination meeting was held at Riga Technical University in Latvia to promote the Mediterranean diet in eastern European countries. Therefore, promotion and dissemination activities carried out throughout the country continue in both national and international phases with other countries and international organizations with which we have academic cooperation.

## 6. CNESTEN

Morocco is located on the southwest coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This country is undergoing a demographic and epidemiological transition. During last decades, the consumption of red meat increased and was accompanied by a steadily increasing consumption of bread. Morocco, like several developing and Mediterranean countries, is suffering from the consequences of a deviation from the MD, and it has shown much progression in the last decades [Benjelloun S. Nutrition transition in Morocco. Public Health Nutrition. 2002;5(1a):135–140. doi: 10.1079/phn2001285. ]. Its dietary patterns incurring profound and rapid modifications as a consequent of growing urbanization, economic development, globalization, and increased production in the food industry, thus, conduct to a nutritional. In order to preserve this heritage, which represents one of the many aspects of our civilization, civil society is mobilizing. The main objective is to combat certain dietary abuses by sounding the alarm against a standardized diet and harmful to health.

1-Project of the "Mediterranean Diet" of Chefchaouen
https://obs.agenda21culture.net/sites/default/files/2019-09/Chefchaouen2019_ENG.pdf2-

Slow Food Bouregreg Foundation

Young association affiliated with Slow Food International. The conception of Slow Food concerning agriculture, food production, and gastronomy is based on three fundamental principles: good food, clean, and fair. It also revealed that the majority of Moroccan local products meet these criteria and that two products constituting a Moroccan exception have received from Slow Food International the designation of sentinel. These are argan oil and saffron Taliouine. A sentinel is defined by International as a project for the safeguarding and promotion of food heritage and agricultural biodiversity. Before becoming a sentinel, products must be part of the "Ark of Taste", a catalogue of quality agri-food products from around the world at risk of extinction. Morocco has high-quality local products that constitute an original national heritage. Today's world is threatened by industrial and intensive agriculture with harmful consequences for both man and his environment. Morocco can play a leading role in safeguarding culinary traditions and preserving this art that is part of the local collective memory.

Objectives of the Slow Food Foundation:

To contribute to the preservation of the rich national agricultural and culinary heritage.

Encouraging all stakeholders to develop the search for innovative human and technological solutions to adapt to a constantly changing world.

Prioritize training actions, multidimensional information, and awareness-raising for the actors concerned, focusing on the art of consuming, sensitize populations to the defense of a clean environment with healthy and varied products, to help poor people access financial resources to create income-generating products and access to adequate consumer goods.

The Moroccan "Plan Maroc Vert" (Green Morocco Plan - PMV)

The Green Morocco Plan (PMV), launched by His Majesty the King in Meknes in April 2008, encourages the creation of cooperatives through grants and organizational support. In 2017/18, the area planted with olive


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trees reached 1.045 million hectares, i.e., nearly 300,000 hectares since the launch of the Green Morocco Plan. Production, although erratic, also increased to nearly 2 million tons in the 2018/19 campaign, an increase of 28% over the previous campaign (Harbouze et al., 2019, p. 35).

The PMV objective is to make agriculture the driving force for economic growth. It aims at doubling agriculture's added value within a decade through a comprehensive overhauling of the sector's structure in terms of cropping patterns, land tenure, and agricultural taxation. The national strategy seeks to increase productivity and improve food security by providing a roadmap for investment programs in the agri-food sector and implementing a series of systemic public sector reforms. The PMV will transform the currently underperforming agricultural sector into a source of growth for the country, developing high-value and high-performing agriculture (Pillar I), and combating rural poverty by supporting small farmers in marginal areas (Pillar II).

Labelled Local Products in Morocco

The labelled products mainly concern local products in all the regions of Morocco and present, including olive and argan oils, fresh and dried fruits (clementine, apple, pomegranate, dates, almonds), the aromatic and medicinal plants and their derivatives (rosemary, rose, saffron) as well as products of animal origin (honey, cheese, red meat).

Promotion of Moroccan Olive Oil.

## 7. CONSUMERS LEBANON

Lebanese food is closely tied to the broader Mediterranean diet, and it shares many similarities with the dietary patterns of other Mediterranean countries. The Mediterranean diet is often considered one of the healthiest diets in the world due to its emphasis on fresh, whole foods and a balanced approach to nutrition, the Mediterranean Diet is renowned worldwide for its health benefits and emphasis on fresh, locally sourced ingredients.

The Mediterranean Diet Education Program in Lebanon stands out as a best practice for promoting this healthy dietary pattern. Its multifaceted approach, involving the community, chefs, nutritionists, and government support, ensures the widespread adoption of the Mediterranean Diet and helps preserve Lebanon's rich culinary heritage for future generations.

Lebanon, with its rich culinary traditions and historical ties to the Mediterranean region, is deeply intertwined with the Mediterranean Diet culture. Here are some key aspects that highlight Lebanon's connection to the Mediterranean Diet:

1. Abundance of Fresh Produce: Lebanon's favourable climate and fertile land allow for the cultivation of a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. Lebanese markets are brimming with colourful, locally grown produce, making it easy for residents to incorporate these essential Mediterranean Diet elements into their daily meals.
2. Olive Oil: Olive oil is a cornerstone of the Mediterranean Diet, and Lebanon is no exception. The country produces high-quality olive oil, with a long history of olive cultivation. It's used not only for cooking but also as a staple in Lebanese dishes like tabbouleh and Fattoush.
3. Traditional Lebanese Dishes: Many traditional Lebanese dishes align perfectly with the Mediterranean Diet. Dishes such as hummus, baba ghanoush, grilled kebabs, and stuffed grape leaves are not only delicious but also nutritious, featuring ingredients like chickpeas, eggplant, lean meats, and fresh herbs.
4. Seasonal Eating: Lebanese cuisine emphasizes seasonal ingredients, ensuring that meals are not only flavourful but also packed with nutrients. This approach aligns with the Mediterranean Diet's emphasis on eating what's in season.


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5. Fresh Seafood: Lebanon's proximity to the Mediterranean Sea means that fresh seafood is abundant and widely enjoyed. Grilled fish, seafood salads, and dishes like "sayadieh" (fish with rice) are popular, providing a source of lean protein rich in omega-3 fatty acids.
6. Culinary Culture: Lebanese culture places great importance on communal dining and sharing meals with family and friends. This social aspect of food aligns with the Mediterranean Diet's focus on enjoying meals in a convivial atmosphere.
7. Preservation of Culinary Heritage: Efforts are made in Lebanon to preserve traditional cooking techniques and recipes, ensuring that the knowledge of Mediterranean Diet practices is passed down through generations.

Consumers Lebanon is a nationwide organization NGO working in the defence and promotion of consumer rights and contributing in updating, improving and enforcing the laws and decrees related to consumers right. since its establishment in 2000, is a full member of consumer international (CI) and Arabe union of consumer protection, it aims to build up consumer awareness through trainings, transparency and consumer information, such as with the publication of its monthly Consumers' Newsletter, as well as leaflets, brochures, posters, exhibitions, and interviews.

In the area of food rights, it works extensively to campaign on issues of food safety and quality, pollution, pesticides, drinkable water and the use of additives and colorants in food, it also tests foods for presence of illegal industrial dyes and water for safety. It provides support to municipalities, training workers on food safety control and monitoring markets through a specialized volunteer force from the organization through the department of food safety and inspection that established in 2006.

Consumers Lebanon participates in international and Arab forums and sits on a number of national committees, participating in meetings of the National Codex Committee in the Ministry of Agriculture and the committee of organic agriculture as well as with the national Salt Committee. It raises awareness on areas of food safety concerns, such as the risks of pesticides and the importance and legislation of organic agriculture, posting widely on its website many topics of research it has carried out related to food safety, consumer rights, misleading advertising, as well as health and legal guidelines issued by the association. It is campaigning for the use of a "Quality Seal" to be affixed to the outer envelope of goods and food products to show they meet the health conditions and standards adopted by the organization.

Since its inception thirteen years ago, Consumers Lebanon has established a strong relationship based on trust and integrity with various Parliamentary Commissions, Ministries, International Organizations, including the European Union, the UNIDO, the FAO, WHO the World Bank, Amideast, USAID, as well as all country members of Consumers International around the world. Furthermore, Consumers Lebanon has close ties with Economic Associations, Syndicates and the media. We firmly believe that a triangular cooperation between Lebanese institutions, interested parties and Consumers Lebanon is a dynamic process that will ultimately promote economic and social development.

Specific objective:
To increase the awareness of consumers (in particular young people and children - exposed to the risk of losing Mediterranean healthy eating habits) about the benefits of the Mediterranean Diet (MD) by reinforcing the capacity of schools, local authorities.
Lebanon's culinary heritage and cultural practices are closely aligned with the Mediterranean Diet. With its focus on fresh, locally sourced ingredients, olive oil, and traditional dishes, Lebanon is a natural hub for embracing and promoting the healthful Mediterranean Diet. Efforts to preserve and educate about this cultural and dietary tradition are essential for the well-being of the Lebanese population.
Promoting the Mediterranean diet through a consumers' NGO in Lebanon can have a significant impact on public health and nutrition. Here are steps and strategies to consider when working towards this goal:

1. Research and Education:


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- conducting survey research on the adherence to mediterranean diet current, dietary habits and health issues prevalent in Lebanon. This will help you tailor your promotion efforts effectively.
- Develop educational and awareness materials and resources that explain the benefits of the Mediterranean diet, including its impact on reducing the risk of chronic diseases.

2. Community Engagement:
   - Engage with local communities and encourage them to embrace the Mediterranean diet as a community-wide initiative.
   - Organize community events, food festivals centered around Mediterranean cuisine in a different Lebanese regions
3. Partnerships with Local Farmers and Markets:
   - Encourage consumers to buy fresh, local, and seasonal produce by forming partnerships with local farmers and markets (visit money farms)
   - Highlight the economic benefits of supporting local and durable agriculture.
4. Online Presence:
   - Create through website and social media a category for project in order to share information, recipes, success stories, and updates on Mediterranean diet initiatives.
5. Media Campaigns:
   - Launch media campaigns, including television, radio, and print advertisements, to raise awareness of the Mediterranean diet.
6. Collaboration with Existing Organizations:
   - Partner with existing health and nutrition organizations, NGOs, and government agencies to pool resources and knowledge and organize share activities about MEDDIET.
7. School and university Programs:
   - Work with schools and university to organize session to introduce Mediterranean diet.
8. Research and Publication:
   - Participation to international congress (Rennes, Istanbul) poster presentation.
   - Submission article to international journal.

Remember that changing dietary habits and promoting a healthy lifestyle is a long-term endeavour. It's important to be patient, persistent, and adaptable in your efforts to promote the Mediterranean diet in Lebanon through your NGO. By working collaboratively and tailoring your approach to the specific needs and cultural context of Lebanon, you can make a positive impact on public health and nutrition in the region.

However, it's worth noting that despite this strong connection to the Mediterranean Diet culture, Lebanon, like many countries, faces challenges such as changing dietary habits due to urbanization, globalization, and the availability of processed foods. There is a need for continued education and promotion of the Mediterranean Diet to maintain its cultural and health significance in Lebanon. So, consumers- Lebanon can play this role especially in especial project like Switchtohealthy Eu Prima project.

**8. KTB**

The Custom of Tradesmen's restaurants and the Selluka Certificate

We would like to share the tradition of Tradesmen's restaurants and their recognition of qualities such as local taste, local ingredients, and quality of service, customer satisfaction and gastronomic value with a certificate issued by Izmir Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism.

Tradesmen's restaurants are taste stops that have been offering the most delicate samples of Mediterranean food at reasonable prices to the tradesmen around them for many decades. The definition of tradesmen includes all the workers nearby, business owners and those who are in the area to trade. Most tradesmen's restaurants are generally small businesses. Some of the tradesmen's restaurants in our country still continue their existence today through the management of the third and fourth generation.


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Natural disasters, climate changes, global warming, epidemics that have started to occur frequently in the world in recent years and greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere negatively affect all the living things and healthy nutrition. One of the most basic needs of people, eating and drinking is gradually losing its quality of being healthy as a result of countless negativity in the environmental conditions that no more favour natural products' growing conditions as before.

Nowadays, unhealthy nutrition such as products with additives, products containing genetically modified organisms, hormone-containing foods and fast food have become common. On the other hand, due to the obligations of working life, many people no longer have desired time to spare for their eating and they have to simply try to fill their stomachs as quickly as possible. Even the nutritional quality that the meals should have as a basic need is a far away dream for most people, let alone eating being a pleasurable experience. However, meeting the eating and drinking needs with foods prepared within the framework of a country's food culture can create delicious experiences as well as being healthy.

Today, the effort to spread healthy nutrition awareness has brought the tradesmen's restaurant tradition to the agenda. These restaurants that can be considered the very reflection of home cooking on the street, they offer a wide range of flavours that would suit the taste of many people. Relatively small-scale restaurants located in city and business centres are tradesmen's restaurants that offer traditional Turkish cuisine featuring many examples of Mediterranean at reasonable prices and generally operate during the working hours of the surrounding businesses. Over time, tradesmen's restaurants have also become showcases for promoting local gastronomic riches in a touristic sense.

Today, food plays an important role in getting to know the cultures of different countries and regions for travellers as well. According to research, tourists spend an important amount of their travel budget on food and beverage. The share of food and beverage expenditures in world tourism revenues is has a significant place and the food and beverage factor is considered very important in destination selection.

In a small town or city, a tradesmen's restaurant might be the safest place to eat and drink, especially for a foreigner looking for a place to have lunch. Moreover, even when there were no map applications or business ratings like today, it was not difficult to find a tradesmen's restaurant. When you are hungry at noon in a little town you visit for the first time, it should be enough to walk towards the town's bazaar where the tradesmen should be located right next to the important edifices of the town. You will not encounter any surprises regarding the quality and price of the food served. Because it is the shopkeepers who have been going to that restaurant for decades that actually determine the average quality and the price and in fact, the menu consists of dishes cooked in the kitchens of every house in that city. Because this is one of the best ways to eat quality food away from home. The tradesmen's restaurant offers a safe adventure opportunity to embark on some new experiences as well. For example, when you go to another town, you may come face to face with a dish that you do not know much about in the city you live in. Maybe this too is a potato dish, but it is not like the dishes you used to eat. This way, you will see that different dishes can be made from the same ingredients and maybe your horizons will broaden a little.

In tradesmen's restaurants, orders are generally not placed at the table, and meals are not served from the kitchen. In a tradesmen's restaurant where you have eaten many times or entered the door for the first time, all the dishes are on a counter in front of your eyes. You choose and order the meal or dishes you will eat there, and then sit at a table. If the number of dishes you want to taste is too much, you can want to try them all and expand the flavour spectrum. You can ask for a chef's plate; a tradesmen's restaurant classic. It is a delicious plate where you get one spoon of all the basic dishes.

The fact that the meals change according to the days and seasons creates the concept of "menu of the day" and this is an indication that fresh meals are always served in tradesmen's restaurants. Recently, the importance of natural life, environmental awareness and healthy nutrition has begun to be taken into consideration more than before; therefore, the importance given to local foods and local dishes has substantially increased. The local businesses are trying to provide food diversity for their guests while


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consumers are also looking for healthy and sustainable features in the products they buy. For these reasons, customers demand local dishes.

The tradesmen's restaurant is an institution established before the modern living culture. But still a tradesmen's restaurant is a business that employs cooks with a mastery certificate and has completed the sanitary establishment criteria and documents required by local administrations. It is a restaurant of a local life, it is the flavor base of a time when our living radius was much smaller than today. The tradesmen's restaurant is simply a traditional home cooking restaurant.

SELLUKA (Vigna caracalla) AWARD and CERTIFICATE

With the Selluka Award and Certificate Project, the Diners/Restaurants and Food Products Selling Businesses within the Historical Kemeraltı Renewal Area in Izmir are evaluated within the framework of criteria such as local taste, local ingredients, and quality of service, customer satisfaction and gastronomic value and as a result the "Selluka Certificate and Award" are given within the scope of food safety to the businesses deemed suitable.

In this context, forms for examination and evaluation and the Official Control Report document were prepared in line with the "Directive on the Establishment, Working Procedures and Principles of the Action Committee for the Determination and Promotion of the Gastronomic Values of the Historical Kemeraltı Region" and the "Directive on the Working Procedures and Principles of Giving the Selluka Certificate/Award" and finally the approval of the Governor was received.

As it is known, the food inspection system aims to ensure that the consumer has access to safe food by determining whether the conditions specified in the legislation are met and, when necessary, by ensuring that these conditions are met with legal sanctions and measures.

However, there is no mechanism to reward businesses that carefully implement the criteria in the legislation and give high importance to food safety by making it sustainable. One of the main aims of this project is to create a competitive environment and awareness among businesses in order to move towards healthy and sustainable food by putting Local Taste and Gastronomic Value criteria at the center of the food industry.

Workplaces that apply to the Food Safety Action Board within the Provincial Directorate to receive an Award/Certificate will be evaluated within the framework of the criteria determined by the commission appointed on behalf of the board. Evaluation Commission is formed by official institutions and organizations, universities and NGOs. In the audit carried out by the commission, if the specified criteria are met, the commission will decide unanimously to award the applicant institution with one selluka, two sellukas or three sellukas. In this context, the Selluka Award/Certificate project is a comprehensive and objective project implemented by the official authority with the principle of impartiality and without any monetary reward or benefit.

Selluka (Vigna caracalla) exclusively Mediterranean and Aegean is one of the indispensable plants of ancient Izmir houses and it is one of the most valuable and showy ivy species in the world with its delicate purple and white flowers. This flower, which has been the ornament of Izmir houses since ancient times, is also the color and scent of Izmir.

Businesses with Selluka Certificate will be promoted throughout Turkey and abroad through free advertising in various newspapers and especially gastronomy magazines, on virtual platforms and fairs at home and abroad and on the websites of Public Institutions and Organizations, private organizations and NGOs. Agencies operating especially in the field of Gastronomy, will be notified and they will be advised for their incoming local and foreign tourists to prefer these businesses.


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## 9. REGIONE CAMPANIA

The General Directorate of Agricultural, Food, and Forestry Policies in the Campania Region, as part of its efforts to promote the Mediterranean Diet to younger generations, organized an innovative TikTok challenge. During the "Inventa il Tuo Spot" contest, which attracted 3,140 students and 460 teachers, participants were encouraged to create video clips promoting the Mediterranean Diet. As a part of this contest, a unique online challenge was launched on TikTok to determine the most popular video clip. This challenge generated over 13,000 interactions within a few days, showcasing the effectiveness of using digital platforms to engage youth in discussions about healthy eating habits. The winning class was honored with the title of "Influencer of the Mediterranean Diet," further emphasizing the impact of social media in promoting dietary awareness among younger demographics.
Another successful activity carried out by the General Directorate for Agricultural, Food, and Forestry Policies is the launch of the Food Education and Consumer Awareness Program, reaching over 30,000 citizens annually through tastings, events, and workshops. A key initiative is the Regional Register of Educational Farms,Another key initiative for the promotion of the Mediterranean Diet carried out by Regione Campania is the Regional Register of Educational Farms, now including 300 farms, which serve as learning hubs for students and families. The annual Open Farms Day highlights the rural world and promotes healthy eating.

Educational Farms help:

- Connect people with rural traditions
- Promote sustainable agriculture and health awareness
- Encourage environmental respect and seasonal eating

In 2023-2024, Open Farms was part of the SwitchtoHealthy project, encouraging the Mediterranean Diet. The next edition is set for May 10, 2025, continuing its mission beyond the project's official end on March 31, 2025.

Campania Region also implements successfully the "Fruit and Vegetables in Schools" and "Milk in Schools" programs, aiming to encourage the consumption of healthy products among primary school children. Each year, the national program involves about 1 million students in Italy, with 120,000 in Campania. 94% of the children appreciated the program, and 90% expressed a desire to continue. Additionally, the initiative has led to an increase in fruit and vegetable consumption, with 37.9% of children changing their opinion about milk.

The Region has also implemented additional actions such as educational workshops, farm visits, school gardens, and thematic competitions to raise awareness among young people and families about the importance of a healthy diet.

## 10. SLOW FOOD

Among the promotional actions of the Mediterranean Diet in the Mediterranean, the activity carried out by the Future Food Institute with which the engineer Franz Martinelli, president of Gi.&Me. Association and responsible for the SWITCHtoHEALTHY project for the Slow Food Tebourba Association collaborates,
deserves particular attention. Martinelli has stipulated a partnership agreement to spread the values of the "Mediterranean Diet" in every context, in particular with young people, a concrete example of a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, as defined by UNESCO as a "social practice based on a set of skills, knowledge and traditions that range from the protection of the landscape to the table and which concern, in the Mediterranean basin, crops, harvesting, fishing, conservation, transformation, preparation, cooking and above all method of consuming the meal.

The new dynamics of interaction between man and his nourishment in relation to health, culture and the environment are also being studied, in light of the changes brought about by the use of new technologies and ongoing social changes and which today attracts innovators from all over the world, training students from all over the world, animated by the mission of accelerating positive processes of change through university master's degrees, intensive courses, educational workshops and bootcamps, in order to train the


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citizens of tomorrow starting from schools, and the actors of today's agri-food sector (entrepreneurs, professionals, farmers, chefs).

Promoting the Mediterranean Diet goes far beyond supporting a diet that respects the planet. It means embracing a balanced "lifestyle", where harmony with the natural environment intersects with community support and a deep connection with oneself, what we today call One Health. To celebrate this model, the Future Food Institute and the Municipality of Pollica, in partnership with the organizations headed by Franz Martinelli, have launched a series of digital events and learning programs entirely dedicated to the Mediterranean Diet and healthy lifestyle as models to achieve social, cultural and environmental prosperity towards the United Nations sustainable development framework. Authoritative initiatives, which see the participation of numerous young people from various Italian schools in the promotion of the Mediterranean Diet to which the SwitchtoHealthy project was presented by Franz Martinelli who underlined the importance of educating the new generations as active citizenship for healthy development of the Mediterranean Diet in the territories to which they belong and as a strategic key to building an environmentally friendly future.

**11. UNIPR**

Review of the Mediterranean Diet Promotional Actions in the Mediterranean Basin **(**University of Parma)

Parma, recognized by UNESCO as a Creative City of Gastronomy, has committed to promoting food-related culture. The Foundation Parma UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, with the University of Parma as the scientific supervisor, was established to advance this mission. In September 2019, during the UNESCO Forum on Culture and Food: Innovative Strategies for Sustainable Development, the Foundation declared its support for the principles of the 2030 Agenda, focusing on fostering creative solutions to promote cooperation across culture, education, and science.

The Foundation is dedicated to preserving traditional diets, such as the Mediterranean Diet, which are vital for sustainable development. Food is seen as both a cultural heritage and a tool for dialogue, inclusion, and sustainable development. The Mediterranean Diet represents a balance between humanistic and scientific knowledge and transcends territorial and food boundaries.

Regions and cities are vital in fostering mutual influence between traditions, cultures, and behaviours, creating new social practices around food. The Mediterranean Diet plays a crucial role in this by promoting healthy eating habits and cultural diversity while contributing to global identity.

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