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EuroHealthNet

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[Farm to Fork Strategy \(/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12183-Farm-to-Fork-Strategy-\)](/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12183-Farm-to-Fork-Strategy-)

EuroHealthNet welcomes the EC's commitment to develop a Farm to Fork Strategy for sustainable food systems. We strongly support a comprehensive, ambitious and truly transformative transition to European food systems that put people and planetary health, sustainability and social equity at the centre. In a framework of the European Green Deal, this strategy offers an important opportunity to design and deliver a coherent response to current - and future, if business as usual prevails - health, social and environmental challenges related to unsustainable food production and consumption patterns.

Unhealthy diets – major contributor to a NCDs pandemic - are already responsible for over 950,000 deaths and 16 million DALYs lost in the EU (the 2017 Global Burden of Disease). Today's food systems are perpetuating and driving up health inequalities - which is conspicuously missing from this proposed strategic thinking. There is an abundance of evidence to show that sedentary and unhealthy lifestyles of people are heavily influenced by their social, economic, and environmental circumstances and cultural contexts. Therefore, a pivotal role for a modern, fit-for-purpose strategy will be in creating food environments where “a healthy choice is an easy choice” for all. EuroHealthNet counsels against disproportionate focus on ‘downstream’, ‘personalised’ lifestyle-oriented measures (information, education) without real appreciation of the underlying causes of ill-health and disease, the social determinants. They are part of a solution, but not enough to drive the transformative changes needed.

To this end, many effective, evidence-based and innovative policy solutions exist. In particular, EuroHealthNet advises the EU to enable healthy, inclusive and sustainable food environments through:

Production:

- Reform agriculture and food policies in line with public health and other public good priorities (social fairness, environment);
- Put public health promotion and protection upfront in trade and investment policies;

Added-value field:

- Establish nutritional standards for healthy diets in educational settings, hospitals, and public institutions; supporting shorter food supply chains in (peri)urban settings;
- Roll out harmonised, understandable and reliable consumer nutrition information (front-of-pack);
- Support healthy and sustainable public food procurement;
- Lead food reformulation in line with public health and social fairness principles;

Consumption:

- Enforce/review gaps in regulatory actions on marketing/advertising of unhealthy foods (esp. to vulnerable consumers, children);
- Explore better use of EU competences in fiscal, budgetary and economic policies in support of stronger health protection against commercial determinants of health; advancing coherence across various policy areas;
- Improve (digital) health literacy and skills for healthy lifestyles/diets with due attention to health equity and digital divide;
- Quantify societal (incl. health) and environmental costs of unsustainable production/consumption, along a social gradient;
- Address food and nutritional poverty/insecurity that lead to diet-related health inequalities through EU anti-poverty and social policy schemes (Child Guarantee, FEAMD);

The above considerations should feature in a proposal for an Action Plan and its regulatory/supporting measures. Beyond ensuring coherence between this strategy and other initiatives under the European Green Deal (notably the Cancer Plan), it should outline transparent and inclusive food governing processes, prioritising binding measures over voluntary mechanisms which have so far been largely ineffective in addressing NCDs. EuroHealthNet has been calling for sustainability, health and equity indicators to be better integrated within the EU flagship processes and tools (the European Semester, the EPSR, the MFF). These would then align with the UN Agenda 2030 and its goals, and aspirations towards the Economy of Wellbeing.

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