

European Public Health Conference (EPHC)

Plenary 1: Transitioning to more sustainable food systems that support health and wellbeing

Thursday 9 November, 14:00 – 15:00 UTC, Dublin

Abstract

Food is central to our health and well-being, yet many aspects of our food systems have become unhealthy and unsustainable. Our food systems today contribute significantly to, and are being destabilised by, the environmental crises we are facing. An increase in the consumption of low-quality diets is the leading cause of death and a major contributor to the burden of non-communicable diseases in Europe. **Dietary guidelines issued by governments do not align at all with what is being produced, consumed, and exported.**

Food systems have also contributed to creating, entrenching and widening health inequalities across Europe, as subgroups of the population have little access to and ability to choose healthy and sustainable food. In addition, the benefits of current food production and consumption systems go to large transnational companies rather than small companies and primary producers; the average EU farmer for example earns 50% of the average worker in the economy.

Major external shocks such as COVID-19 and the Russian war against Ukraine have reflected the vulnerability of our current systems of food production and redistribution, as experienced through growing levels of food inflation, food insecurity and hunger in Europe, and even more so in other parts of the world.

Ambitious intersectoral and systemic approaches are needed to address current contradictions in our food systems, and to make them more sustainable and resilient. Public health professionals need to step up their action to highlight the impacts of unhealthy food consumption, advocating and engaging in political debates. Promising policies at the EU level, such as the Farm to Fork Strategy, Sustainable Food Law, and on Food Security, set out planned measures to make food systems more environmentally friendly, fair and healthy. **Ensuring that such policies are actually implemented, and that environmental, health and social considerations are valued in equal measure as economic ones, remains however a major challenge.**

This plenary session will focus on **what measures are urgently needed and must be prioritised to ensure more sustainable food systems and to improve health and wellbeing across Europe.** The plenary will also discuss the challenges, and the role of health professionals in helping to achieve this critical shift.