



# NUTRITION QUICK TIPS SERIES



## CREATING AND MAINTAINING CONSUMER DEMAND FOR HEALTHY DIETS

*This note complements Quick Tips: Nutrition-sensitive food production and Quick Tips: Nutrition-sensitive value chains and it focuses on consumer behaviour. Collectively, these three Quick Tips unpack the food system (Figure 1) and provide practical tips to support the programming and design of EU support for agri-food systems that can contribute to healthy diets, food security and nutrition.*

‘Healthy diets are diets that are of adequate quantity and quality to achieve optimal growth and development of all individuals and support functioning and physical, mental and social wellbeing at all life stages and physiological needs. Healthy diets are safe, diverse, balanced, and based on nutritious foods. Healthy diets vary depending on an individual’s characteristics (e.g. age, gender, lifestyle and degree of physical activity), geographical, demographical, cultural patterns and contexts, food preferences, availability of foods from local, regional and international sources, and dietary customs’<sup>1</sup>. [WHO guidance](#) for a healthy diet for adults includes fruit, vegetables, legumes (e.g. lentils and beans), nuts and wholegrains with limited sugar, saturated and trans fats, and salt. WHO recommended consuming one to two 100 g servings of fish per week<sup>2</sup>.

Healthy diets play a critical role in people’s overall health. The COVID-19 crisis has significantly reduced access of the world’s poorest people to healthy diets, as their already fragile livelihoods are affected by efforts to reduce the spread

of infection<sup>3</sup>. COVID-19 has also underscored the critical role of nutrition in strengthening people’s immune systems, with poor diets increasing the risk of severe complications and death as a result of the virus.

1 [CFS, 2021. Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition.](#)

2 [WHO guidance](#) for a healthy diet for adults includes fruit, vegetables, legumes (e.g. lentils and beans), nuts and wholegrains with limited sugar, saturated and trans fats, and salt. WHO recommended consuming one to two 100 g servings of fish per week (FAO and WHO, 2011b), while the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) recommended that adults consume 300 g of fish per week (EFSA, 2014). More recent recommendations have adopted a more holistic approach, taking into account concerns over the environmental impact of food production. The EAT–Lancet planetary health dietary guidelines promote predominantly plant-based diets with limited consumption of animal-source foods as key to sustainable diets, with a specific recommendation of up to 28 g of fish per day per adult (range 0–100 g/day).

3 [Malnutrition: The silent pandemic.](#)

Diets vary around the globe, and to improve nutrition it is important to consider the nutritional needs and diets at an individual level, especially for the poorest, or across the lifecycle, for example, women, adolescents and children. Actions are needed at all stages of the food chain, from production to processing to consumption, and consumers have a critical role to play in supporting and promoting sustainable, safe and healthy dietary patterns. Achieving improved diets and nutrition for all requires attention not only to the supply side (availability of more nutritious foods at affordable prices) but also to the role of consumer choice.

Food-related consumer behaviour is very complex and is influenced by many factors. Individual factors can include food habits – both cultural and familial – attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, motivations, skills, time availability for preparation, gender norms, family and peer relations and societal norms. Extensive evidence has shown that increasing knowledge, awareness or

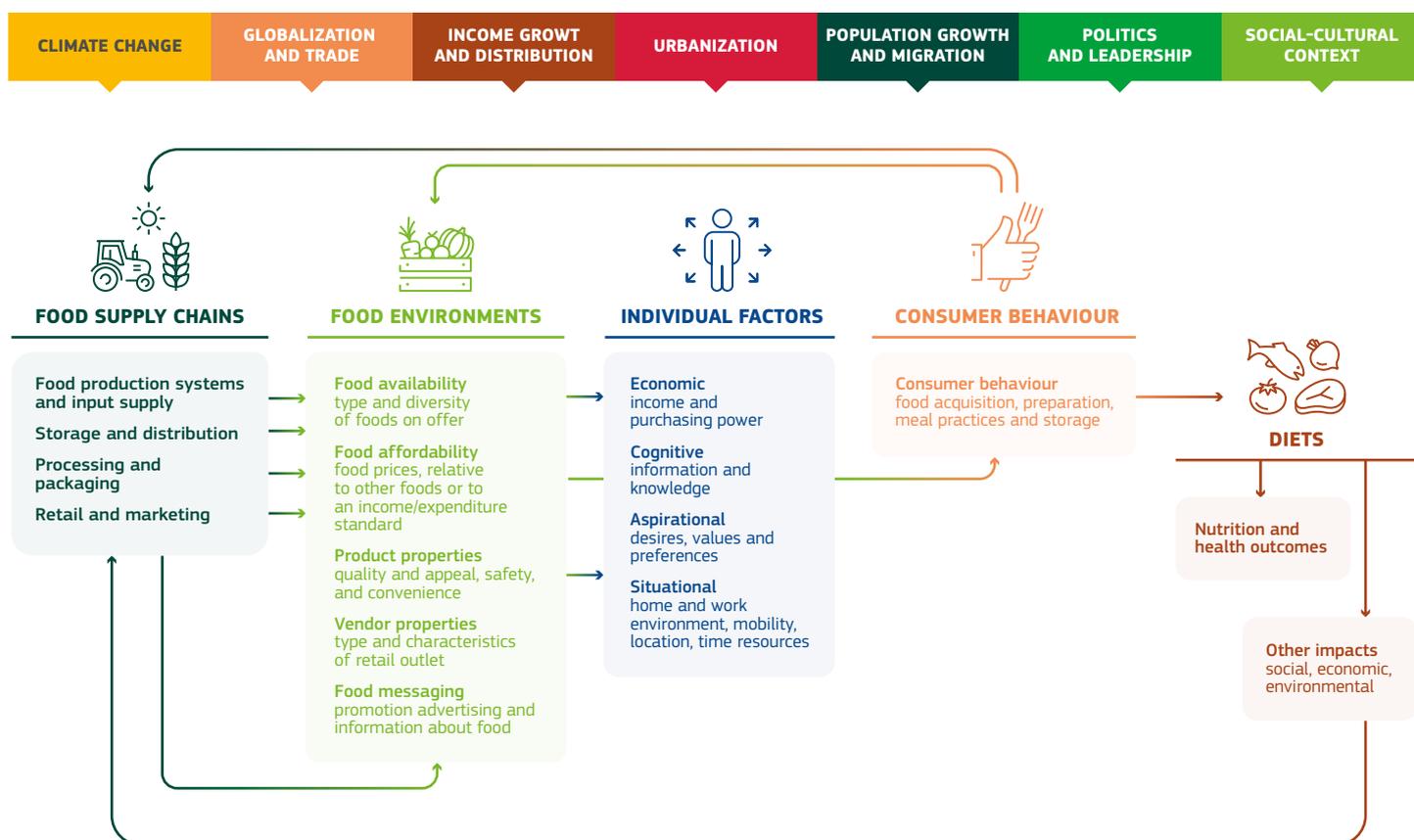
even attitudes without addressing other determinants of human behaviour does not usually translate into sustainable action<sup>4</sup>. Individual factors can also be economic, for example a person's income and purchasing power, which affects their ability to purchase nutritious foods.

Other factors, such as food availability, food prices, food information/labelling, marketing or in summary, the 'food environment', impact on consumers' dietary choices. For many consumers in low- and middle-income countries, nutritious foods such as fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat and fish are unavailable or unaffordable<sup>5</sup>, which relates to both the price of food and the individual's/household's purchasing power<sup>6</sup>.

The EU's Farm to Fork strategy has identified a series of instruments that will allow consumers to have a greater impact on the food produced, the way it is produced and its origin. In this note, we provide an overview of a collection of strategies.

Figure 1: Food Systems Framework<sup>7</sup>

## EXTERNAL DRIVERS



4 GIZ, 2019. Social and Behaviour Change Insights and Practice. A practitioner's guide. [Social and Behaviour Change: Insights and Practice | Behaviour Change.](#)

5 Development Initiatives, 2018. Global Nutrition Report 2018. Chapter 4. [What people eat and why it matters.](#)

6 Refer to Quick Tips: Equality, equity and nutrition and Quick Tips: Social protection and nutrition.

7 Based on Fanzo, J., et al. 2020. Nature Food 1: 243–246.

# Strategies



## Supporting nutrition education<sup>8</sup> and communication strategies that empower and educate consumers to make healthier dietary choices

- **Combine nutrition education with actions to increase the availability** and affordability of nutritious foods as well as appropriate food labelling and marketing strategies. Nutrition education interventions are most effective when they involve several components that reinforce each other.
- **Promote community groups, voluntary organisations and social enterprises** that can play a valuable role in supporting activities which promote healthy eating, encouraging public debate and promoting new social norms.
- **Support the use of social and behaviour change communication** that goes beyond the delivery of a simple message to encompass the full range of ways in which people communicate (i.e. interpersonal communication, community mobilisation and mass media).



## Supporting healthier food environments that ensure access to safe and nutritious food

- Consumer education will have limited effectiveness without improvements in the availability and affordability of nutritious foods. **Specific actions are outlined in:**
  - Quick Tips: Nutrition-sensitive food production,
  - Quick Tips: Nutrition-sensitive value chains,
  - Quick Tips: Equality, equity and nutrition and
  - Quick Tips: Social protection and nutrition.
- **Ensure better provision of high-quality and nutritious foods in public institutions**, including schools and hospitals.



## Supporting capacity development and training for practitioners in health and nutrition education at all levels (individual, institutional and environmental)

- **Strengthen capacity of stakeholders at national, decentralised and community levels in relevant nutrition education skills which take account of their roles.** Nutrition stakeholders may include those from public (e.g. extension officers) and traditional sectors (e.g. community and religious leaders). The content and messaging in extension curricula for agriculture, health and other sectors should be coherent so that all extension workers/development agents promote the same messages on the importance of healthy diets. Support the integration and/or organisation of formal training for nutrition in tertiary education (see also Quick Tips: Education and nutrition).

<sup>8</sup> 'Nutrition education' has been defined as 'any combination of educational strategies, accompanied by environmental supports, designed to facilitate voluntary adoption of food choices and other food- and nutrition-related behaviours conducive to health and wellbeing ... and delivered through multiple venues and involves activities at the individual, community and policy levels'. Contento, I.R. Nutrition education: Linking research, theory and practices. Jones and Bartlett, 2007.



## Supporting national standards for healthy diets

**Support national standards for healthy diets which take account of the population's dietary needs and promote healthier diets in national multisectoral nutrition planning, strategies and policies:**

- **Strengthen national development plans and national nutrition plans and strategies to improve diets across different sectors.** For example, establish national guidelines and standards for healthy diets, such as the development and implementation of food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs), which can educate consumers on healthy diets and provide direction for programmes and policies aiming to ensure healthy diets for all. If possible, these should include separate FBDGs or other associated guidance for one or more age groups (e.g. pregnant and lactating women, infants, children and adolescents) as well as sustainability issues. Support standards on food safety.
- **Strengthen national nutrition and agriculture plans and strategies** to move beyond agricultural production alone and include measures on consumer behaviour and nutrition education.
- **Strengthen development and sector plans to improve diets at the decentralised level.**



## Supporting use of diet quality indicators

**Support the extended use of diet quality indicators, for example that measure dietary diversity and/or reflect adherence to global dietary recommendations, to monitor diets among population groups:**

- **Support the collection and use of data on the supply and consumption of healthy diets in national nutrition monitoring systems.** These systems can help identify diet gaps that need to be addressed at national and local levels. They can also monitor the effectiveness and sustainability of nutrition education interventions. Indicators such as the minimum dietary diversity for women of reproductive age (MDD-W) are currently being incorporated into demographic health surveys.
- **Promote the use of dietary indicators such as the MDD-W and the minimum acceptable diet for infants aged 6–23 months<sup>9</sup>.**

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<sup>9</sup> EU Nutrition Causal Framework (pending revision in 2022).



## Further information and support

- [Voluntary guidelines on food systems and nutrition](#), CFS, February 2021.
- [Farm to Fork strategy](#) for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system, European Commission, May 2020.
- Council Conclusions 2021. Promoting healthy diets through sustainable food systems.
- Global Panel 2017. [Policy actions to support enhanced consumer behaviour for high-quality diets](#). Policy Brief No. 8. London, UK: Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition.
- GIZ 2019. Social and Behaviour Change Insights and Practice. A practitioner's guide. [Social and Behaviour Change: Insights and Practice | Behaviour Change](#).
- Murimi, M.W. et al. 2017. [Factors influencing efficacy of nutrition education interventions: A systematic review](#). *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour* 49(2): 142–165.
- [Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women \(MDD-W\) Guide](#).
- FAO, 2021. [Food Systems and Nutrition – Handbook for Parliamentarians](#). No. 32.
- [EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices](#), 2021.

### Case studies of EU-funded projects:

- [Suchana](#), Bangladesh
- [MDG1c Programme](#), Mozambique
- Resilience Building and Food & Nutrition Security Project, Zimbabwe
- [Quality Diets for Better Health in SNNP region](#), Ethiopia.

These case studies can be studied further in the annex of the [6th Progress Report on the Action Plan on Nutrition](#) or [Projects That Work for Improved Nutrition](#).

The new OECD-DAC policy marker on nutrition was approved by the OECD-DAC for official development assistance reporting in 2019 with the support of the Commission and Member States. According to this marker 'a project should be identified as nutrition related when it is intended to address the immediate or underlying determinants of malnutrition'. An [OECD-DAC Nutrition Policy Marker Handbook](#) is available.

The EU is a global leader in promoting gender equality as a key political objective of its external action and common foreign policy, aimed at accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. By 2025, 85% of new EU actions should contribute to achieving the objective of gender equality and women's empowerment, with more actions including it as a main objective. Women play a critical role in agriculture and food systems, and it is crucial to create conditions to promote their joint participation and engagement in shaping sustainable agri-food systems to improve diets and nutrition. Please refer to **Quick Tips: Nutrition, gender equality and women's empowerment**.

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