

The Preventia project aims to reduce health inequalities and prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs), with a particular focus on cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, across the European Union. It promotes cooperation and knowledge exchange across Member States through training, networking and awareness-raising activities, with the aim of improving health literacy, supporting vulnerable groups and advancing effective prevention policies.

Policy Problem

Non-communicable diseases remain the leading causes of preventable illness and death in the EU. Many of these conditions could be avoided through stronger prevention measures targeting key risk factors such as unhealthy diets, alcohol use, physical inactivity and tobacco consumption. Despite progress in healthcare, the continued burden of NCDs highlights the need for more effective prevention policies across Member States.

Evidence from the Project

The analysis of Preventia pilot countries (i.e., Croatia, Greece, Italy and Lithuania) highlighted several strong national initiatives that could inform future NCD policies at both national and EU level. Examples included community-based prevention programmes, efforts to promote healthy lifestyles, and initiatives supporting physical and mental health.

At the same time, common challenges such as limited prevention funding, weak implementation, poor health system integration and persistent inequalities underline the need for stronger policy action.



Key Policy Recommendations

Given Preventia's focus on preventing NCDs by addressing unhealthy diets as a key risk factor, the following recommendations aim to improve access to healthy diets across the population by creating healthier food environments for all, with particular attention to vulnerable groups.

1. Protect children from harmful food marketing across all media

The EU should adopt a binding framework to protect children up to the age of 18 from the marketing of foods and beverages high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) across all media and settings. As part of this, the revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) should convert existing soft-law provisions on HFSS food marketing into binding, harmonised rules, explicitly requiring Member States to implement mandatory restrictions across both traditional and digital media. The framework should prohibit marketing techniques that appeal to children, including influencer marketing and targeted digital advertising, and be supported by robust monitoring, enforcement, and regular evaluation to effectively reduce children's exposure to HFSS food marketing.

2. Regulate product placement and promotions in retail environments

The EU should introduce guidelines to limit the prominent placement and promotion of HFSS foods and drinks in physical and online retail environments. Restrictions should cover high-visibility locations and promotional techniques that encourage purchases of unhealthy products. Retailers should also be required to promote healthier options, supported by monitoring, enforcement and regular evaluation.



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3. Use fiscal policies to promote healthy diets

The EU should introduce fiscal measures to reduce the consumption of HFSS foods and beverages, with tax designs that incentivise product reformulation and place fiscal responsibility on manufacturers. The EC should issue a guidance document outlining a comprehensive framework for HFSS food taxation. These measures should be monitored for their impact on purchasing, reformulation, health outcomes and equity, and complemented by wider food policy actions.

4. Improve public food procurement and food environments in public institutions

The EU should harmonise public food procurement criteria across Member States and ensure they are clear, simple, and practical to implement. Harmonised nutritional standards, supported by effective implementation guidance and monitoring, should promote healthier food options while limiting HFSS and ultra-processed products. These measures should be backed by adequate resources, reinforced through the EU School Scheme, and regularly evaluated to improve access, equity, and compliance.

5. Increase accountability of large food producers for health and sustainability

The EU should introduce binding accountability requirements for large food companies to improve the health and sustainability of their product portfolios. Companies should be required to report transparently on product nutrition, reformulation progress, marketing practices and environmental impacts. Clear targets, independent monitoring and enforcement should ensure accountability and encourage the production and promotion of healthier, more sustainable foods.

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