

Nutrition among adults

Regular consumption of fruit and vegetables is an important element of a healthy and balanced diet, and is associated with lower risk of cardiovascular diseases and certain types of cancer. The consumption of a minimum of five portions of fruit and vegetables daily is spotlighted in the EU-wide “5-a-day” campaign, which follows the WHO recommendation of at least 400g (i.e. five portions) of fruit and vegetables per day.

On average across the 27 EU member states, only 12% of adults reported consuming five portions or more of fruit and vegetables daily in 2019, while 55% reported consuming between one and four portions a day, and 33% indicated eating less than one portion a day. Countries with the highest proportions of adults reporting having daily intake of five portions or more of fruit and vegetables were Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark and France. Conversely, Romania, Latvia, Luxembourg and the Czech Republic have the highest proportion of adults reporting less than one daily intake of fruit and vegetables (Figure 4.13).

Women are more likely than men to consume at least 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables in all EU countries except Greece. The gender gap was widest in Denmark and Finland, and narrowest in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece and Romania (Figure 4.14).

Daily consumption of at least five portions of fruit and vegetables is consistently highest among adults with higher level of education compared to those with lower education attainment. Countries with the widest education disparities include Denmark, the Netherlands and Ireland (Figure 4.15).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to possibly lasting changes in traditional food purchasing, preparation and consumption patterns, with both favourable and less favourable changes in dietary habits. On the positive side, some studies have reported increasing fruit and vegetable intake and a rise in cooking of home-made meals (EIT Food, 2021^[1]). However, other studies have found increasing snack frequency and more restricted access to fresh products (Skotnicka et al., 2021^[2]).

Interventions to promote healthy diets include subsidies for fresh fruit and vegetables, regulations on promotion of foods high in fat, salt and sugar, setting nutrient-based standards in school and public institutions, reformulation of products with high-levels of sugar, simple and informative front-of-pack labels, and youth programmes on nutrition education.

Following the launch of the 2020 EU Farm to Fork strategy, the European Commission plans to empower consumers to make more informed and healthy food choices by harmonising mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling and establishing nutrient profiles to restrict the promotion of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (European Commission, 2020^[3]).

Definition and comparability

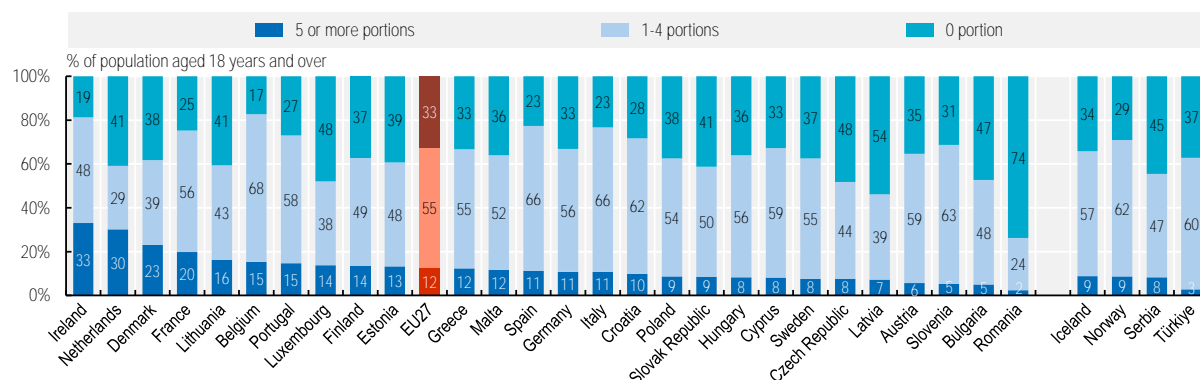
Data on consumption of fruit and vegetables relate to the share of adults (aged 18 and over) who report consuming a certain number of portions per day, excluding fruit or vegetable juices and potatoes. The category “0 portion” corresponds to those having less than a daily consumption of fruit and vegetables. In Belgium, 100% pure fresh fruit or vegetable juices are included.

Data are stratified by education level. As per the International Standard Classification for Education 2011, tertiary education refers to Levels 5-8 (short-cycle tertiary education, bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees, doctoral degrees). The non-tertiary education group corresponds to the simple average of “less than upper secondary” and “upper secondary and less than tertiary” education.

References

- EIT Food (2021), “COVID-19 impact on consumer food behaviours in Europe”, [1]
https://eit.europa.eu/sites/default/files/20423_covid-19_study_-_european_food_behaviours_-_report.pdf.
- European Commission (2020), *Farm to Fork Strategy*, https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-05/f2f_action-plan_2020_strategy-info_en.pdf. [3]
- Skotnicka, M. et al. (2021), “Dietary Habits before and during the COVID-19 Epidemic in Selected European Countries”, *Nutrients*, <https://doi.org/10.3390/NU13051690>. [2]

Figure 4.13. Daily consumption of fruit and vegetables among adults, 2019

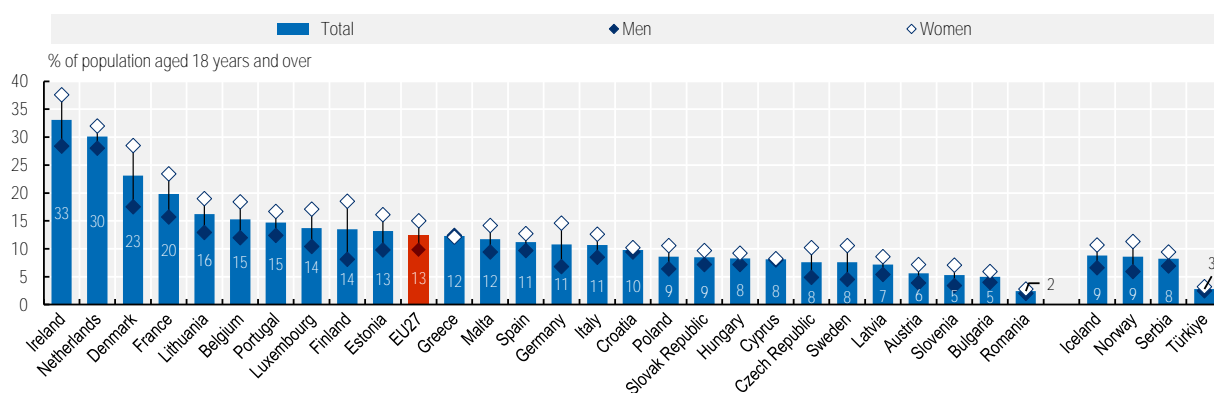


Note: The EU average is weighted.

Source: Eurostat, 2022 (EHIS 2019).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/eiwl0>

Figure 4.14. Daily consumption of 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables among adults, by gender, 2019

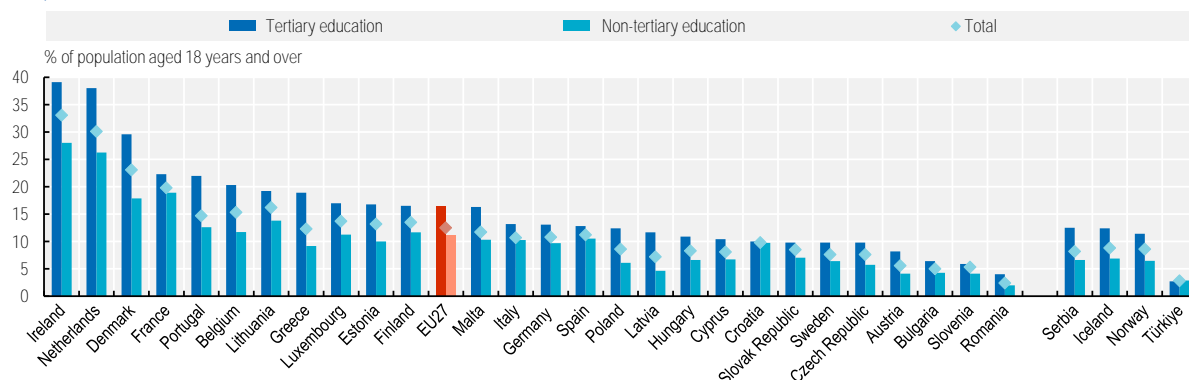


Note: The EU average is weighted.

Source: Eurostat, 2022 (EHIS 2019).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/7xzt8v>

Figure 4.15. Daily consumption of 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables among adults, by education level, 2019



Note: The EU average is weighted.

Source: Eurostat, 2022 (EHIS 2019).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/0w5u9f>



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