

Nutrition is fundamental for child and adolescent development and long-term health. Taking good nutrition habits at a young age, including eating fruit and vegetables regularly, can protect against many serious health problems such as obesity and diabetes.

On average across EU countries, more than half (56%) of 15-year-olds reported not eating any fruit or vegetable each day in 2018 (Figure 4.11). In Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and Bulgaria, a larger share of the 15-year-olds reported eating fruit or vegetable each day, although this does not necessarily mean that they consume a greater overall quantity of fruit and vegetables each day. According to another comprehensive food consumption survey, adolescents in Belgium and the Netherlands were usually consuming a lower quantity of fruit and vegetables per day (measured in grammes) than the EU average (Sciensano, 2019). In all EU countries except Malta, boys are more likely than girls to report eating no fruit or vegetable each day.

A number of policies can promote greater fruit and vegetable consumption among young people, including health education and promotion in schools, increasing the fruit and vegetables content in food served in schools, mass media campaigns targeting both young people and parents, and regulations on advertising of unhealthy food targeting children (OECD, 2019). Most EU countries have launched national campaigns to promote greater consumption of fruit and vegetables, notably through “five a day” campaigns (e.g. in Germany, Spain, France). However, only one in nine (11%) 15-19 year-olds reported eating five portions or more of fruit and vegetables in 2014 on average across EU countries.

At the European level, the School Fruit Scheme adopted in 2008 promotes fruit and vegetable consumption among school-aged children. This programme was later combined with the school scheme on milk and other dairy products. In 2017/2018, over 20 million children in 159 000 schools across EU countries benefited from this joint scheme (European Commission, 2019). Some programme evaluation indicates that the scheme led to a short-term increase in the frequency and volume of fruit and vegetable consumption among school children (Methner et al., 2016). More recently, the 2020 EU Farm to Fork strategy has set ambitious goals to improve food quality and promote more informed consumer choices about food products, including among children and adolescents.

Across EU countries, the share of 15-year-olds who report eating at least one fruit every day increased slightly from 35% to 37% between 2014 and 2018, and the proportion of those reporting to eat at least one vegetable also increased slightly from 32% to 34%.

Promoting better nutrition at a young age also entails reducing the consumption of products high in sugars, fat and salt. On average across EU countries, about one in six (16%) 15-year-olds drank sugared soft drinks each day in 2018 (Figure 4.12). This proportion was highest in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Malta and Bulgaria, where more than one in four

15-year-olds reported to consume soft drinks every day. Across all countries, boys were more likely to report drinking sugared soft drinks each day than girls (19% compared with 13% on average in EU countries).

The share of 15-year-olds consuming sugared soft drinks every day has decreased since 2014 in most EU countries (by 5 percentage points on average), but it has increased at least slightly in Finland, Lithuania, Slovenia, Latvia and Denmark.

A number of policy actions have been taken in many countries to reduce the consumption of sugared soft drinks, such as the reformulation of products to reduce sugar levels, smaller portion sizes, front-of-pack labels promoting low-sugared drinks, taxes based on the sugar level in products, and marketing/advertising restrictions on products highly sugared (OECD, 2019).

Definition and comparability

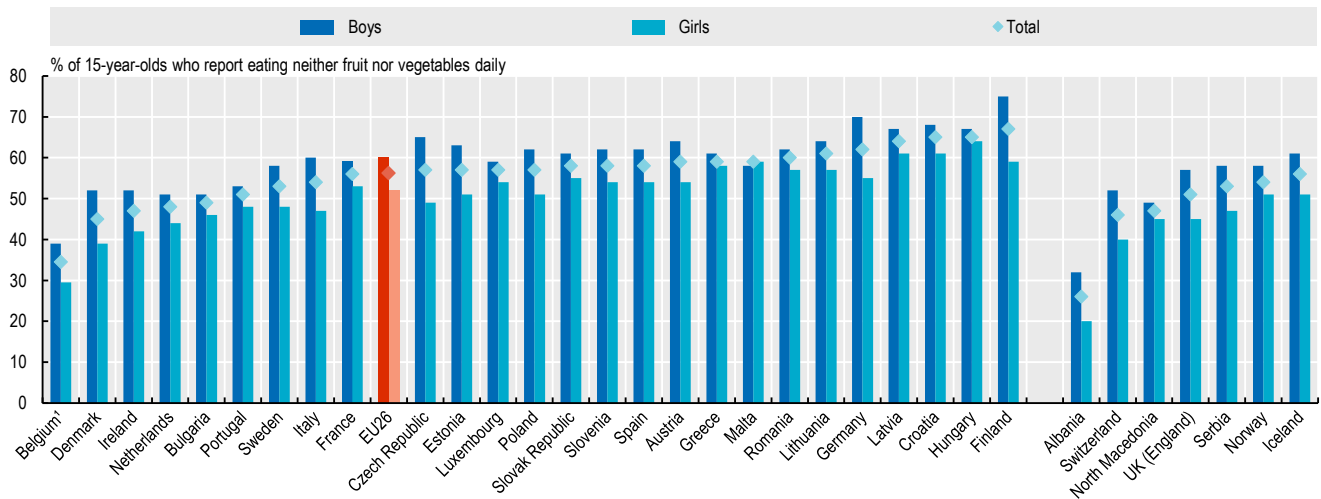
Dietary habits are measured in terms of the share of 15-year-olds who report not eating any fruit or vegetables every day and drinking a sugared soft drink each day. Since the survey questions on fruit and vegetable consumption do not explicitly ask respondents to exclude juices, soups or potatoes, these may be included in responses.

Data come from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study. The HBSC surveys have been undertaken every four years since 1993-94 and now include all EU countries except Cyprus. Data are drawn from school-based samples of 1 500 children in three age groups (11-, 13- and 15-year-olds) in most countries, ensuring that the sample is representative of each age group.

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Figure 4.11. Share of 15-year-olds not consuming any fruit or vegetable each day, 2018

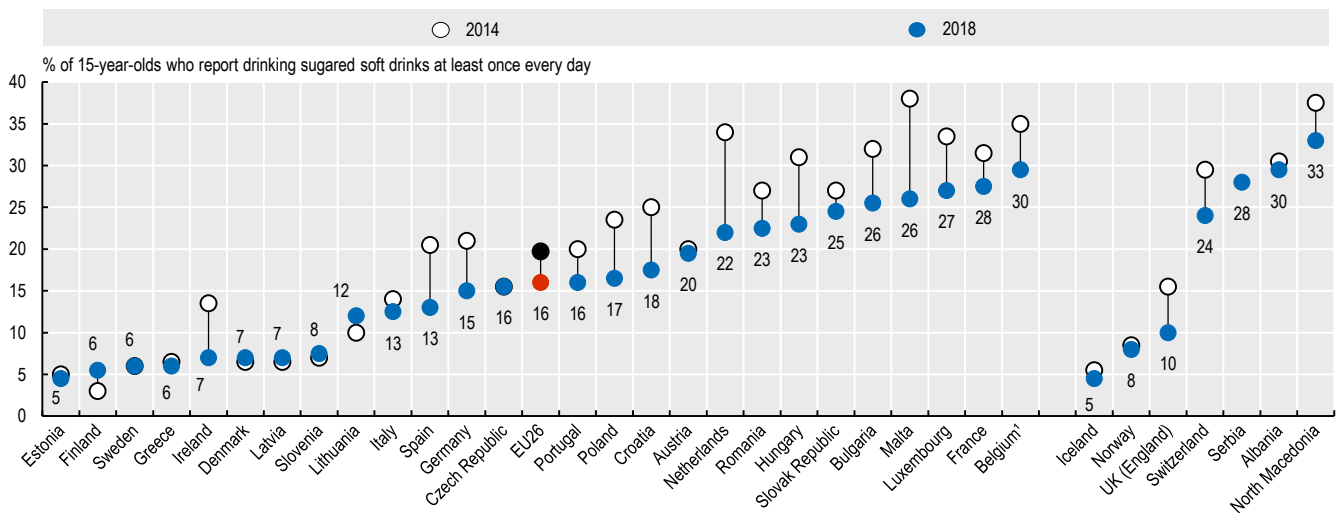


Note: The EU average is unweighted. 1. The value for Belgium is the unweighted average of the Flemish and French Communities.

Source: HBSC data from Inchley et al. (2020).

StatLink <https://stat.link/y0i8xp>

Figure 4.12. Share of 15-year-olds consuming sugared soft drinks each day, 2014-2018



Note: The EU average is unweighted. 1. The value for Belgium is the unweighted average of the Flemish and French Communities.

Source: HBSC data from Inchley et al. (2020).

StatLink <https://stat.link/86pms9>



From:

Health at a Glance: Europe 2020

State of Health in the EU Cycle

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/82129230-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD/European Union (2020), "Nutrition among children and adolescents", in *Health at a Glance: Europe 2020: State of Health in the EU Cycle*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/c3b8c14c-en>

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