

Summary report on the

Consultation on development of a draft regional nutrient profiling module

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Tunis, Tunisia
8–10 December 2014



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Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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1. Introduction

In order to reduce marketing of food to children in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, nutrient profiling has proven to be an effective and critical tool. It is defined as the science of classifying or ranking foods according to their nutritional composition for reasons related to preventing disease and promoting health. It provides a means of differentiating between foods and non-alcoholic beverages (henceforth just ‘foods’) that are more likely to be part of a healthy diet from those that are less likely, it is about defining foods, not diets. Nutrient profiling has a number of uses – health claims, public procurement of food, for example through schools, and for marketing restrictions.

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean organized a meeting in Tunis, Tunisia, from 8 to 10 December 2014 to develop a regional nutrient profile model based on the regional nutrient profile model that is currently being finalized for the WHO European Region.

The main objectives of the consultation were to:

- develop a draft regional nutrient profile model for marketing foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children;
- develop an outline for piloting the model in one of the regional countries.

The expected outputs were a draft regional nutrient profile model for marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children and an outline for a pilot project in one country of the Region.

Nutrition experts in the Region from academic institutions, ministries of health and other national organizations reported on country experiences in testing the draft model. Participants came from Bahrain, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates.

The meeting was inaugurated by His Excellency Mr Mohamed Salah Ben Ammar, Minister of Public Health of Tunisia. He highlighted WHO efforts and guidance in promoting a healthy diet and controlling the increasing incidence of obesity and noncommunicable diseases in the Region. He said that the Ministry of Health was taking action to reduce salt and fat intake at population level and to this end an action plan was being developed. He requested WHO support in implementing recommendations relating to noncommunicable diseases, including elimination of unhealthy diets.

The opening remarks of Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, were delivered by Dr Ann-Lise Guisset, Deputy WHO Representative in Tunisia. In his message, Dr Alwan made reference to the World Health Assembly of May 2010, which had endorsed a set of WHO recommendations on food marketing to children through resolution WHA63.14. The recommendations clearly acknowledged the relationship between food marketing and childhood obesity and called on Member States to restrict the marketing to children of food and non-alcoholic beverages, which are high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt.

Moreover, the Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, adopted by the General Assembly in September 2011, urged Member States to promote the implementation

of the WHO recommendations (paragraph 43). These calls were reiterated in WHO Global Action Plan on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable diseases for 2013–2020, which the Health Assembly unanimously adopted in May 2013.

He added that the Sixty-first session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, held in October 2014, supported the Regional Director's initiative to protect public health and promote healthy lifestyles, with a special focus on countering the largely unopposed commercial practices that promote unhealthy products, particularly those targeting children; and implementing the WHO recommendations on marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children.

A situation analysis for the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region regarding food consumption patterns as they relate to obesity and diet-related NCDs, as well as data on rates of obesity and diet-related NCDs in the Region was presented by Dr Ayoub Al Jawaldeh, Regional Advisor, Nutrition, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

2. Conclusions

Nutrient profiling methodology was reviewed and the role of WHO in providing guidance in the development and use of nutrient profiling, particularly in the development of regional models was discussed and facilitated by Dr Ayoub Al Jawaldeh, Dr Nishida Chizuru and Professor Mike Rayner. Dr Jewell shared WHO Europe's experiences in developing and testing the regional model for the WHO European Region. In addition, participants were provided with country

experiences in developing nutrient profile models from Norway and South Africa.

In preparation for the consultation, several countries in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region were asked to test the draft model for the WHO European Region using regional and national food composition databases and other related resources, and provide feedback on using the model. Nutrition experts in the Region, representing academic institutions, ministries of health and other national organizations reported on country experiences in testing the draft model. Countries that presented included: Bahrain, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates reported on the development and use of a model (adapted from the Nordic Keyhole model) as part of a subnational nutrition labelling programme.

Findings of country testing were synthesized and discussed. Results of country experiences with the draft model helped to inform the following sessions during which a draft nutrient profile model was developed for the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Through extensive discussion, the draft nutrient profile model for the WHO European Region was adapted taking into account regional foods and patterns of eating, as well as other concerns of countries. Adaptations included modifying and adding categories, nutrient thresholds and sample/reference foods relevant for the Region. Though several adaptations were made, the draft model that was developed remained very similar to the European model.

A draft nutrient profile model for marketing food and non-alcoholic beverage to children in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean

Region was developed. After the draft model had been agreed upon, next steps were discussed.

3. Recommendations

To WHO

1. Conduct additional testing of the regional draft nutrient profile model after finalization of feedback from countries.
2. Create a network for collaboration between academic institutions, ministries of health and other national organizations to improve sharing of results and experiences in further developing and testing the nutrient model and other issues related to the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children.



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