



The Importance of Breakfast in Europe

A Review of National Policies
and Health Campaigns

Executive Summary



in partnership with

Executive Summary

The benefits of breakfast as part of a healthy and balanced lifestyle are widely known and understood from a nutritional, psychological and societal point of view. Studies show breakfast consumption is associated with a number of critical health factors which include healthy body weight, especially among children and adolescents,¹ but also lower Body Mass Index and a lower likelihood of being overweight more generally.² This is particularly important at a time when Europe's obesity rates are on the rise. Breakfast is also linked to better consumption of vitamins and minerals (including calcium, vitamin D, folic acid, iron and fibre).^{3, 4}

While the health and lifestyle implications of regular breakfast consumption are largely understood, breakfast skipping remains far too common, and many European governments do not devote sufficient effort to encouraging Europeans to have breakfast.

***The Importance of Breakfast in Europe: A Review of National Policies and Health Campaigns* takes a unique look into the way governments communicate around, and promote consumption of, breakfast. This report, providing an analysis of information on and promotion of breakfast in 16 European countries, is the result of work conducted by the Breakfast is Best campaign – which includes the European Breakfast Cereal Association (CEEREAL), the European Medical Association (EMA), the European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) and the European Club of Paediatric Dietitians/le Club Européen des Diététiciens de l'Enfance (CEDE) – and Professor Louise Dye, an expert on nutrition and behaviour at the University of Leeds.**

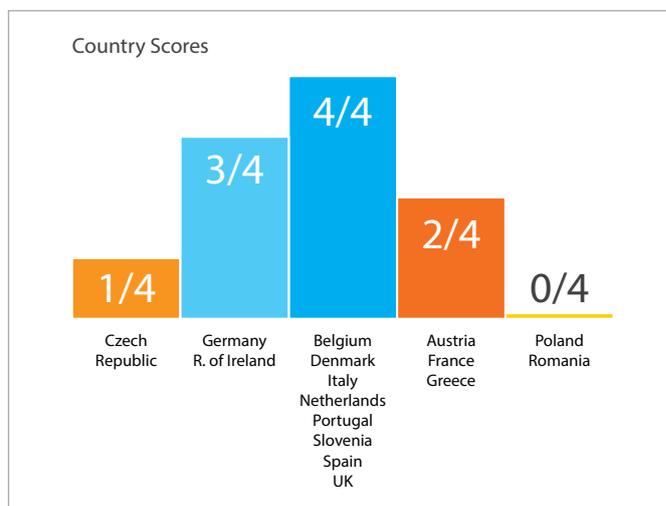
The 16 countries were selected on the basis of available public information, drawing on data from the latest "Health Behaviour in School-aged Children" (HBSC) study published in 2016 by the World Health Organization (WHO)⁵ and national authority websites, scientific papers and literature reviews, and other sources. While this first edition covers 16 EU countries, we aim to expand this over time to cover all EU Member States.

This report aims to be a reference and benchmark for evaluating public policies when it comes to improving Europe's breakfast consumption figures

and reaping the potential health benefits thereof. It can act as a means to encourage greater dialogue with health experts, health organisations, and industry alike, who can add value and bring unique insight in helping to shape such policies.

The following four key benchmarks were used to analyse overall performance based on how well each country's government meets the four criteria:

1. Does the Ministry of Health or another national ministry reference the importance of breakfast in its official documentation or communications?
2. Does the Ministry of Health or another national ministry actively monitor and measure breakfast consumption data as a key indicator of health and well-being?
3. Is the information provided by public authorities on breakfast consumption and related health and lifestyle aspects clear and user-friendly?
4. Does the government organise or support ongoing campaigns to promote the consumption of breakfast and to raise awareness of its benefits?



Half of all countries surveyed met all four criteria. These included Belgium, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and the UK, which shows that top performers can be found in both northern and southern Europe. On the other hand, Poland and Romania came out at the bottom, meeting none of the criteria, and the Czech Republic only ticked

1 de la Hunty A, Gibson S, Ashwell M. (2013). Does regular breakfast cereal consumption help children and adolescents stay slimmer? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Obesity Facts* 6 (1): 70-85.
2 de la Hunty A, Ashwell M. (2007). Are people who regularly eat breakfast slimmer than those who don't? A systematic review of the evidence. *Nutrition Bulletin* 32: 118-28.
3 Barr SI, DiFrancesco L and Fulgoni VL. (2013). Consumption of Breakfast and the type of breakfast are positively associated with nutrient intakes and adequacy of Canadian adults. *Journal of Nutrition* 143 (1): 86-92.
4 Barr SI, DiFrancesco L and Fulgoni VL. (2014). Breakfast consumption is positively associated with nutrient adequacy in Canadian children and adolescents. *British Journal of Nutrition* 112: 1373-1383.

one box. 80% of surveyed countries were found to have referenced the importance of breakfast in public material produced by the relevant government agency or ministry and to have scored well on the quality and user-friendliness of breakfast-related information.

This report also compares these findings to breakfast consumption figures. Unsurprisingly, for the most part the countries that promote breakfast most effectively are also leaders among 11 and 15-year-olds who eat breakfast every weekday. The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the Republic of Ireland, Belgium's Flemish Community, England and Denmark lead for 11-year-olds (of which at least 78% regularly have breakfast), with Slovenia and Romania trailing in last place (only around 55% regularly breakfast). Very similar rankings can be seen among 15-year-olds: nearly the same countries are top rankers (averaging between 62% and 80%), with the exception of England which drops significantly in ranking in this older age group; and Slovenia and Romania are again at the bottom (under 40%), although Slovenia has recently taken active measures to improve these statistics and ranks among this report's top performers, suggesting that these figures might improve in the coming years. A gender gap is increasingly visible with age, with older adolescent boys more likely to have breakfast every school day than their female counterparts.

Most notably, this report highlights that many governments need to increase their focus on breakfast consumption as part of healthy diet and living strategies, and better inform the general public on the scientifically proven benefits of positive breakfast behaviour throughout one's lifetime. As breakfast skipping has been associated with other health-compromising behaviours in children and adolescents – including physical inactivity⁶ and low fruit and vegetable intake⁷ – it seems clear that promoting positive behaviours, such as breakfast consumption, could be an important step for public health bodies.

The report also identifies examples of good practice which can serve as a practical guide for other governments and health organisations in adapting breakfast promotion policies.

While breakfast is only one potential factor among many that may influence health indicators, promoting breakfast could be a cost-effective way to achieve positive outcomes and assist in reducing the economic health burden of obesity and related non-communicable diseases.

The EU has already taken some steps in the right direction towards addressing pan-European health issues, yet more needs to be done to promote breakfast consumption as a tool in addressing today's health challenges, particularly as there is currently no dedicated EU level campaign.

That is why the "Breakfast is Best" campaign focuses on three main policy goals:

1. The long term goal of ensuring that, by 2020, all EU countries include the importance of eating breakfast in their nutrition policies, and monitor breakfast consumption as a key health indicator.
2. Have "Eat breakfast everyday" added to standard nutrition advice, and include the importance of breakfast in school curricula and employee health initiatives.
3. Ensure that the "Health 2020 strategy" of the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) and EU actions on health inequalities reflect the importance of eating breakfast for long-term health outcomes.

Through these and other actions, and in working alongside other like-minded stakeholders and partners, the Breakfast is Best campaign calls on Europe's policymakers – both at national and EU level – schools, businesses and civil society alike to do more to help improve breakfast consumption figures and reap the potential health benefits thereof, for today and generations to come. We hope that this report can contribute to achieving these aims.

5 Inchley J et al., eds. Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 7). Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HSBC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.

6 Sandercock GRH, Voss C and Dye L. (2010). Associations between habitual school day breakfast consumption, body mass index, physical activity and cardiorespiratory fitness in English schoolchildren. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 64: 1086-1092.

7 Pedersen TP, Meilstrup C, Holstein BE and Rasmussen M. (2012). Fruit and vegetable intake is associated with frequency of breakfast, lunch and evening meal: cross-sectional study of 11-, 13-, and 15-year-olds. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition & Physical Activity* 9 (9): 1479-5868.

About the Breakfast is Best Campaign

Although the idea of breakfast being the most important meal of the day is widely known and understood, many Europeans fail to act on this knowledge. This is why the European Breakfast Cereal Association (CEEREAL) representing the European breakfast cereal and oat milling industries joined forces with like-minded health organisations such as the European Medical Association (EMA), the European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) and the European Club of Paediatric Dietitians/*le Club Européen des Diététiciens de l'Enfance* (CEDE) to launch the science-based "Breakfast is Best" campaign in 2008.

The purpose of our coalition is to significantly increase awareness among European and national level decision makers about the importance of breakfast and ensure that the message "breakfast is the most important meal of the day" is as well understood and acted upon as the advice to "eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day".

In so doing the campaign aims to highlight the positive impact of breakfast in four key areas:

- In helping to **prevent obesity**
- As an aid to **improve general health**
- **Maintain cognitive performance and concentration**
- Provide the body with the energy it needs to **kick-start metabolism**

The Breakfast is Best campaign calls on policymakers to include the importance of breakfast in dietary recommendations and to monitor breakfast consumption as a key health indicator. More specifically the campaign urges the European Union and Member States to:

- **Include "eat breakfast every day" in public health information campaigns**
- **Have "eat breakfast every day" added to all lists of standard nutrition advice tips**
- **Include the importance of breakfast in school curricula**
- **Encourage public-private partnerships, employers and civil society to promote breakfast in the workplace, in schools and at home**

Together with a wide range of multi-stakeholder supporters from across Europe, we call on European leaders to put breakfast at the heart of public health promotion campaigns and encourage Europeans to "Make Time for Breakfast" as a significant but achievable step towards achieving healthier lifestyles. In order to achieve this, we have set some clear objectives:

1. Ensuring that, **by 2020, all EU countries include the importance of eating breakfast in their nutrition policies and monitor breakfast consumption as a key health indicator.**
2. **"Eat breakfast everyday"** is added to standard **nutrition advice** and the importance of breakfast is included in **school curricula** and **employee health** initiatives.
3. The **WHO/Europe "Health 2020 strategy"** and **EU actions on health inequalities** reflect the importance of eating breakfast for long-term health outcomes.

As an active member since its launch in 2008, EFAD supports BIB because it recognises breakfast is an important opportunity to improve nutrient intake for people of all ages. According to Judith Liddell, Secretary General of EFAD, "Skipping breakfast tends to cause people to snack (possibly unhealthily) mid-morning, so there are definite benefits to eating something over nothing in the morning. Ideally people should eat a breakfast containing a balance of food groups including fruit, fibre, dairy and other traditional breakfast foods. Regularly eating a healthy breakfast can reduce the risk of becoming obese which can lead to diabetes and high blood pressure." She continues, "the Breakfast is Best initiative is the only EU campaign that promotes breakfast as a contributor to public health both to the public and, just as importantly, to policymakers."

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Judith Liddell, Secretary General, EFAD

As part of its engagement programme, the Breakfast is Best campaign launched a "Make Time for Breakfast Pledge" initiative, gathering support and signatures from healthcare professionals, to policymakers, to the general public from around the world, driving awareness on the benefits of breakfast as a tool to address health challenges in the 21st century.

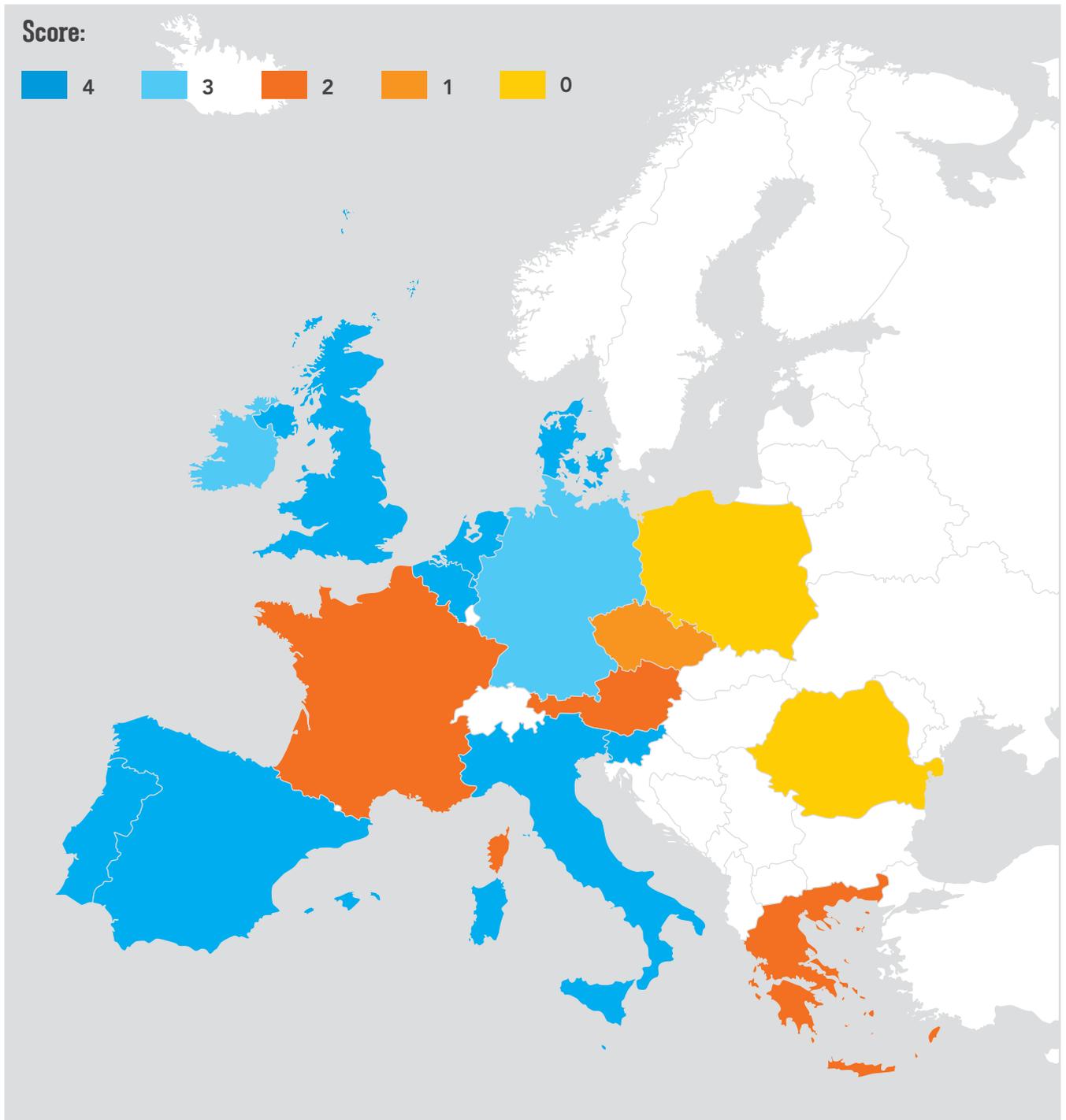
For further information on the Breakfast is Best initiative, please visit our website www.breakfastisbest.eu, visit our pledge page at www.breakfastisbest.eu/pledge, or follow us on Twitter [@BreakfastIsBest](https://twitter.com/BreakfastIsBest).



in
partnership
with



Country Score Map



The above map represents overall performance based on how well each country's government meets the four criteria:

1. Does the Ministry of Health or another national ministry reference the importance of breakfast in its official documentation or communications?
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To access the full report - *The Importance of Breakfast in Europe: A Review of National Policies and Health Campaigns* - please visit our website.

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