

Youth Manifesto on Food Systems



International Youth Health Organization - YHO, together with the CAZAS from Montenegro, MMSA from North Macedonia, and World Obesity Federation from the UK, carried out a series of activities in the field of food systems and nutrition for health, activating around 400 young people to advocate for a more effective nutrition policy.



Poor eating habits reflect the environment in which an individual lives. It is a misconception that poor eating habits are simply the result of insufficient information and lack of persistence. If we want to address the epidemic of nutrition-related illnesses, we will not solve this simply by raising awareness. We want to overcome the challenges in the food systems from four closely related aspects that are very important in addressing this social challenge: health, environment, social inequalities, and economic factors. Above all, all aspects are closely linked to political decisions (laws, regulations, financial incentives, etc.) because, as mentioned above, having the information on healthy eating is not enough.

The purpose of the project was to engage and empower young people in the field of advocacy, identify what we need to change in the current nutrition system, and gather all the information in a manifest that will be used as an advocacy tool in addressing decision-makers. At the same time, the aim was to encourage the youth to continue to activate themselves at the political level for changes that will come from their needs.

The following pages present recommendations targeting relevant stakeholders created at the Youth Manifesto on Food Systems final seminar in Ljubljana, Slovenia, from 28 August to 1 September 2022. Recommendations stem out the consultation process that engaged young people in Slovenia, North Macedonia, and Montenegro.



Health Aspect

1 THERE IS TOO MUCH AFFORDABLE JUNK FOOD ON THE MARKET.

Our suggestion for the Ministry of Economics is to set recommendations for supermarkets regarding the positioning of junk and healthy food.

We recommend that healthy food is positioned based on neurological marketing strategies (e.g., middle shelves) and junk food should be less visible to stop subconscious and impulsive buying of unhealthy options.

We recommend that all the stores have nutrition information points and if that is not possible, we can implement the traffic light method on labeling (e.g., red for unhealthy).

2 MANY PEOPLE ARE PRONE TO SELF-DIETING TO LOSE WEIGHT AND FOLLOW “HEALTH TRENDS” THAT ARE NOT MEDICAL RECOMMENDATIONS, WHICH CAN HARM MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH.

Our recommendation towards the media and the Ministry of Health is to promote healthy diets on every corner in medical facilities (e.g., info stands, infographics, posters, and other online and offline awareness raising/educational activities) and warnings about the harm of self-dieting.

3 LOW-INCOME FAMILIES CANNOT AFFORD HEALTHY FOOD AND, THEREFORE, EAT UNHEALTHY, CHEAPER JUNK FOOD, RESULTING IN OBESITY AMONG FAMILY MEMBERS.

Naše priporočilo Ministrstvu za izobraževanje, znanost in šport je zagotoviti brezplačne športne aktivnosti za vse otroke in mladostnike tudi izven rednega izobraževanja. Priporočilo Ministrstvu za zdravje je, da v nasprotju s tako velikim vnosom zdravil spodbuja več fizičnih aktivnosti, ki bi pomagale pri njihovem stanju. To bi lahko storili s predpisovanjem telesnih aktivnosti, ki jih krije zdravstveno zavarovanje.



4 THERE IS A BIG PROBLEM IN SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS, UNIVERSITIES, AND DORMITORIES WITH EASY ACCESSIBILITY OF UNHEALTHY FOOD

We recommend that relevant institutions (Ministry of Health, Education, and Economics, as well as Institutions of Public Health) ban junk food in their facilities and provide new vending machines with healthy food. In addition, we need to create packages with healthy food to enable easier intake of such food (for example, cut and dried apples). For kids to be more driven to healthy options, some gifts can be placed at the bottom of the packaging. We also recommend stricter and more frequent food quality control in public institutions.

The Ministry of Education and educational institutions should create a school garden and determine the time dedicated to growing fruits and vegetables during the school week. Every school should have a garden where healthy products would be grown and used for healthy school meals.

5 MOST OF THE PACKAGING IS PLASTIC CONTAINERS. AS THE FOOD IS TRANSPORTED ACROSS THE WORLD, IT STAYS IN THOSE PACKAGES FOR A LONG TIME, LOSES ITS QUALITY, AND CAN CONTAIN MICROPLASTICS.

We recommend the Ministry of Agriculture and the governments promote local food production and distribution of food.



6 MOST OF THE CITIZENS ARE NOT LITERATE IN HEALTH TOPICS. THAT MEANS THEY HAVE LOW NUTRITION LITERACY (FOR EXAMPLE, THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND DECLARATIONS ON FOOD LABELS), WHICH IS A DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF THE LACK OF NUTRITION CENTERS IN OUR COUNTRIES. THE PROBLEM IS THAT IN OUR CULTURE, HOME-COOKED MEALS ARE UNCONDITIONALLY PRESENTED AS HEALTHY REGARDLESS OF THE INGREDIENTS THEY MIGHT CONTAIN.

We suggest the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education create infographics explaining all declarations on food labels so that people would know what to buy and what to eat. They should be placed in all relevant institutions and supermarkets. This approach would probably resolve the problem of misperception related to traditional food.

7 THERE IS A MISBALANCE BETWEEN DIFFERENT TYPES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AND ADEQUATE NUTRITION FOR THAT KIND OF PHYSICAL ENGAGEMENT.

We suggest that the Ministry of Sports fund the creation of a forum that would be run by health professionals and would be a safe place for gathering information about a healthy lifestyle, taking into consideration the type of physical activity of users.

8 THERE IS A HUGE IMPACT OF UNACHIEVABLE BEAUTY STANDARDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, WHICH ARE MOSTLY VERY HARMFUL TO BOTH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH. CONSEQUENTLY, WE GET MORE AND MORE FOOD DISORDERS IN THE YOUNGER POPULATION AS THEY WISH TO ACHIEVE CERTAIN BODY TYPES.

We recommend that the Ministry of Education provide and create frequent workshops in schools, especially for the adolescent population, because they are the most vulnerable group affected by body dysmorphia. It would be necessary to include all relevant professionals as trainers (nutritionists, doctors, fitness coaches, psychologists, etc.)

9 THERE ARE NO SERVICES PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT.

We suggest the Ministry of Health employ nutrition professionals in all health facilities and promote these services.

10 IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS SCHOOLS, DORMITORIES, HOSPITALS, ETC., SPECIAL NUTRITION NEEDS FOR PEOPLE WITH ALLERGIES OR OTHER DIET-RELATED CONDITIONS ARE NOT MET AND THEIR SPECIAL FOOD IS VERY EXPENSIVE.

We recommend the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health gather information about allergies and special nutrition needs of students during the registration process. The same should be mandatory for other above-mentioned institutions. Moreover, these institutions should provide such foods for people in need.

Marketing Aspect

1 THE UNHEALTHY OPTIONS ARE MORE PROMOTED THAN THE HEALTHY ONES.

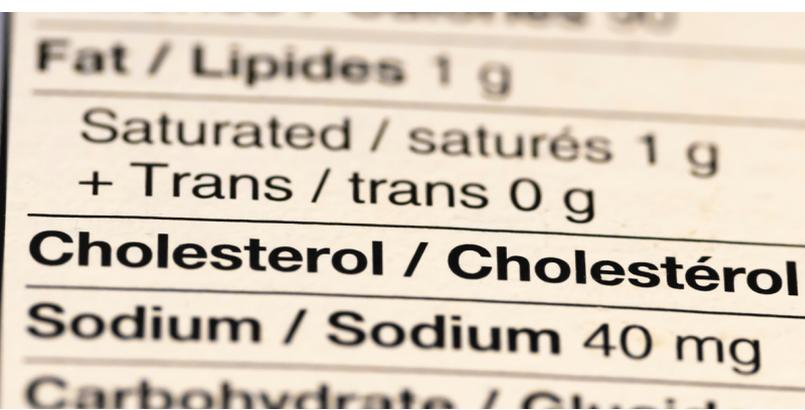
We propose that the Ministry of Agriculture develop, adopt, and implement a strict legal framework for advertising and labeling food products. Regarding the positioning of products in stores, products with high sugar levels should be placed in specific places, for example, on higher shelves and not so close to the register.

We recommend that the Ministry of Health develop minimal standards for labeling food (no chemical names or clear labels).

2 BIG COMPANIES USE THEIR POWER TO MISLEAD CONSUMERS THROUGH MANIPULATIVE ADVERTISING.

We recommend the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health pass laws to limit misleading marketing of products and create agencies that would penalize the companies manipulating the law.

3 THERE ARE INADEQUATE LAWS REGARDING THE NUTRIENTS OF PRODUCTS.



We recommend the Ministry of Health set stricter control measures for the labeling of products and regulate their size.

4 THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH THE LACK OF MARKETING FOR HEALTHY FOOD.

We suggest that the Ministry of Health pass laws limiting fast food marketing and increasing taxes on unhealthy foods.

5 BIG COMPANIES DONATE TO HEALTH PROFESSIONALS TO ADVERTISE THEIR PRODUCTS.

We recommend the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice make medical professionals accountable for their actions in promoting unhealthy options.

6 FOOD DELIVERY COMPANIES PROMOTE FAST AND UNHEALTHY FOOD.

We recommend that food delivery companies promote healthy options more.





Socio-economic Aspect

1 THE NATIONAL FOOD SERVICE IS NOT ACTIVE AT THE LEVEL NEEDED, WHICH DRIVES THE LOCALLY GROWN PRODUCT PRICES UP.

We recommend that the Ministry of Health allocate more money in subsidies for the locally grown farmers that provide local markets with fresh produce. We recommend taxing fast food products and unhealthy food chains and channeling the money for subsidies and thus solving financial problems.

2 THE PRICES FOR LOCALLY GROWN FOODS AND HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS ARE VERY HIGH AND UNAVAILABLE FOR LOW-INCOME PEOPLE.

We recommend that the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Finance allocate more subsidies for the farmers which, in this case, will lower the prices overall for the products and make them more available for everyone.

3 THERE IS NO FORMAL EDUCATION ON NUTRITION EITHER AT SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITIES.

We suggest the Ministry of Education include the topic of nutrition and all its elements in the obligatory curricula in schools.

4 THE GOVERNMENTS ARE LISTENING TO BIG INDUSTRIES THAN SMALL FARMERS MORE.

We recommend the government have regular meetings with small farmers and consider their aspects when forming new policies.

5 THE HIGHER QUALITY AND LOCALLY GROWN FOOD IS BEING EXPORTED TO OTHER COUNTRIES, WHICH LEAVES THE LOWER QUALITY FOODS TO BE CONSUMED IN THE COMMUNITY.

We recommend that the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Finance incentivize the producers of locally grown foods to supply the local communities (instead of exporting the food).

We came up with the idea of making an app that directly connects the farmers with the consuming population, bypassing the supermarkets (middlemen that buy the food from the farmers for low prices) and giving the population locally grown foods for low prices from the farmers.



6 THERE IS A POORER OFFER OF FOOD DIVERSITY IN RURAL AREAS COMPARED TO URBAN AREAS.

We recommend that the Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Finance allocate funds for more eco-friendly vehicles that can transport food from the urban to the rural areas. One idea on our list is a "mobile market" which can drive through the villages and offer a wide variety of healthy produce. Smaller markets/shops in rural areas should be obligated to sell healthy products.

7 THERE IS A HUGE CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL GAP IN THE FOOD SYSTEMS IN OUR COUNTRY.

We propose the Ministry of Agriculture create laws and legislation regarding the labeling of specific types of food in the diet of minority groups and/or sick people with dietary problems.

8 THE LOW-INCOME FAMILIES ARE PRONE TO LOW-QUALITY DIETS BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT GIVES OUT UNHEALTHY AND LOW-QUALITY FOOD PACKAGES.

We propose the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs provide more healthy food packages containing fresh produce from local farmers.

9 THE FOOD NEEDED FOR PEOPLE WITH DIETARY LIMITATIONS IS VERY EXPENSIVE.

We recommend the Ministry of Health provide health insurance for people with specific dietary requirements, which will cover food-specific costs and help them eat food that is usually too expensive (e.g., gluten-free).

10

MANY PEOPLE WORK LONG HOURS, WHICH IMPACTS THE QUALITY OF THEIR DIET.

We recommend the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Employers implement longer lunch breaks which will be paid and provide free healthy food options to the employees. This could be done by, for example, providing them with a list of healthy food options to choose from in advance for next week.

11

THERE ARE GENDER INEQUALITIES IN OUR SOCIETY THAT IMPACT THE FOOD SYSTEMS.

We recommend the Ministry of Education raise awareness of gender inequalities through community campaigns.





Environmental aspect

1 UNSAFE AND UNSUSTAINABLE STORING OF FOOD IMPACTS ITS QUALITY.

We recommend the Ministry of Agriculture develop a legal framework for safe and sustainable food packaging and distribution.

2 THERE IS TOO MUCH FOOD WASTE.

We suggest the Ministry of Agriculture work on establishing food banks for the distribution of excess food. Also, we recommend to the community and to the Ministry of Agriculture to support platforms like “too good to go” and other innovative approaches for minimizing food waste and creating a fair distribution.

3 UNSUSTAINABLE DIETS AFFECT CLIMATE CHANGE.

We recommend the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture promote and encourage more plant-based diets and sustainable food options.

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