

Abstract

# How Is the Promotion of Sustainable Diets Addressed in Austrian Policies? <sup>†</sup>

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**Background and objectives:** There is growing emphasis on the need to ensure that our food systems and diets are more sustainable, which is important for achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals [1]. Meat production contributes to global environmental problems and excessive meat consumption has also been associated with health problems like cardiovascular diseases, diabetes type II and obesity [2]. Current consumption quantities, especially in Western countries like Austria, exceed dietary recommendations. On average, a person consumes 88.2 kg of meat per year [3] instead of the recommended 23 kg per person per year [4]. A supporting policy framework is needed to make food production more sustainable and contribute to more sustainable diets. Our study therefore aimed to analyse Austrian policies with regard to policy actions targeting sustainable diets.

**Methods:** This policy analysis used existing frameworks encompassing the different dimensions of sustainable diets grouped into 4 key impact behaviors: (1) reducing consumption of meat and animal foods and increasing plant-based foods; (2) reducing the consumption of unhealthy foods, i.e. those that are high in fat, salt and sugar or ultra-processed foods; (3) increasing the consumption of organic foods and (4) reducing food waste at household level [5]. Sustainability frameworks have been applied to policy analysis previously [6]. Policy documents were sought from government websites of ministries and institutions related to food, health, nutrition, sustainability, and agriculture. In addition, representatives of different ministries or governmental institutions were contacted to collect further documents. The documents had to be outputs of decision-making in the form of published strategies, plans or policies and should include legal outputs and sectoral documents proposing policy actions to implement policy goals [7]. Each document underwent content analysis and was coded by two researchers to examine how the different components of the sustainable diet framework were addressed.

**Results:** This analysis included 30 documents, which were published by different sectors: health (n = 10), agriculture (n = 8), climate (n = 5), food safety and nutrition (n = 5), and one document from the education sector. The most proposed policy action related to the 4 key behaviors was related to reduction of unhealthy foods, followed by increasing consumption of organic foods. In addition to the key behaviors, we identified promoting the consumption of regional and seasonal foods as the most dominant, which cut across all government sectors.

**Discussion:** Our study found a strong sectoral divide in the types and numbers of behaviors that were promoted. Actions related to consumption and production were still considered as separate sectoral responsibilities. There is a need to shift the attention to more systemic, inclusive and participatory approaches that require coherent and inclusive policy actions across different sectors, actors and population groups addressing consumption as well as production of sustainable foods through a variety of tools that go beyond the responsibility of the individual.



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