

Abstract

Public Procurement of Food Products in Educational Institutions in Slovenia[†]

Neža Fras¹, Evgen Benedik^{2,3,*} and Matej Gregorič¹

¹ Center for Analysis and Development of Health, National Institute of Public Health, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; neza.fras@nijz.si (N.F.); matej.gregoric@nijz.si (M.G.)

² Clinical Department for Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition, Division of Paediatrics, University Medical Centre Ljubljana, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

³ Department of Food Science and Technology, Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

* Correspondence: evgen.benedik@bf.uni-lj.si

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Abstract: Background and objectives: Kindergartens and schools are an important consumer of food in Slovenia nationwide, and they are obliged to the public procurement of food. The aim of this study was therefore to investigate the consideration of nutritional criteria in public food procurement (PFP) and to identify differences in PFP according to the type, size, and region of the educational institution (EI). Methods: In 2021, a total of 535 Slovenian EIs completed a self-administered questionnaire on nutrition-related practices. The use of nutrition criteria and various practices in the PFP was also assessed. To assess statistically significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$), we performed non-parametric Fisher's exact and chi-square tests. Results: In the requirements of the last public tender of food, EIs mainly considered the conditions related to food quality schemes (92.5%), organic production (83.6%), and adequacy of nutritional value (72.2%). When implementing school meals, they were least likely to fully comply with restrictions on the allowable inclusion of foods with low nutritional value (38.5%) and most likely to comply with recommendations on the frequency of the inclusion of recommended foods (47.0%). Most of the EI respondents (74.0%) confirmed that the criteria based on nutrient profiling would be useful for more healthy food products procurement. More requirements on the inclusion of organic production and nutritional adequacy were found among kindergartens than schools. Statistically significant differences in nutritional quality were found between smaller and larger EIs. More requirements on the inclusion of organic production, quality classes, and nutritional adequacy were found among larger compared to smaller EIs. Differences were also found between EIs from three different regions for the inclusion of organic production requirements. Discussion: Healthy PFP policies can improve access to nutritious and healthy food in EI and promote healthy eating habits. The implementation of the healthy PFP was achieved differently at distinct levels. The presented evaluation suggests that different success in implementation might be attributed to different characteristics of individual EI. System changes might also be needed to support and improve the implementation of healthy PFP policies.

Keywords: public food procurement; educational institutions; school nutrition; nutrient profiling; criteria for nutritionally more suitable food products



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