

Nutrition is an important determinant of health. Inadequate consumption of fruit and vegetables is one factor that can play a role in increased morbidity. Proper nutrition assists in preventing a number of obesity-related chronic conditions, including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, stroke, certain cancers, musculoskeletal disorders and a range of mental health conditions. A European Commission White Paper advocated increasing the consumption of fruit and vegetables as one of a number of tools to offset a worsening trend of poor diets and low physical activity (EC, 2007).

In response to a health survey question asking “How often do you eat fruit?”, the percentage of adults consuming fruit daily varied from 45% in Bulgaria and Romania, to 75% in Italy, Malta and Slovenia, and 84% in Switzerland around 2008 (Figure 2.8.1). Across the 19 EU member states providing data, an average 63% of adults ate fruit daily. Females ate fruit more often than males, with the largest gender differences in Denmark, the Slovak Republic and Germany (23, 20 and 19 percentage points respectively). In Mediterranean countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain and Turkey), gender differences were much smaller, at under 10%.

Among different age groups, older persons aged 65 and over were more likely to eat fruit, with consumption lowest among young people aged 15-24 years, except in Bulgaria and Romania, where young people ate the most (see also Indicator 2.3 “Fruit and vegetable consumption among children”). Fruit consumption also varies by socio-economic status, generally being highest among persons with higher educational levels (Figure 2.8.3). However, this was not the case in Mediterranean countries (Cyprus, Malta, Spain, Greece), where lower educated persons ate fruit more often.

Daily vegetable consumption ranged from around 50% in Estonia, Germany, Malta and the Slovak Republic to 75% in France and Slovenia, with Belgium and Ireland highest at 85% and 95% respectively (Figure 2.8.2). The average across 18 countries was the same as for fruit, 63%. Again, more females reported eating vegetables daily, except in Bulgaria and Ireland, where rates were similar. In the Czech and Slovak Republics, Germany, Italy, Malta and Spain, gender differences exceeded 10%.

Patterns of vegetable consumption among age groups and educational groups are similar to those for fruit. Older persons more commonly ate vegetables daily, except in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Romania. Highly educated persons ate vegetables more often, although the

difference between educational groups was small in Belgium, Cyprus, Italy, Greece, Slovenia and the Slovak Republic (Figure 2.8.4). Differences exceeded 20% in Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania.

The availability of fruit and vegetables is the major determinant of consumption. Despite high variability between countries, vegetable and especially fruit availability is higher in southern European countries, with cereals and potatoes more available in central and eastern European countries. Fruit and vegetable availability also tends to be higher in families where household heads have a higher level of education (Elmadfa, 2009).

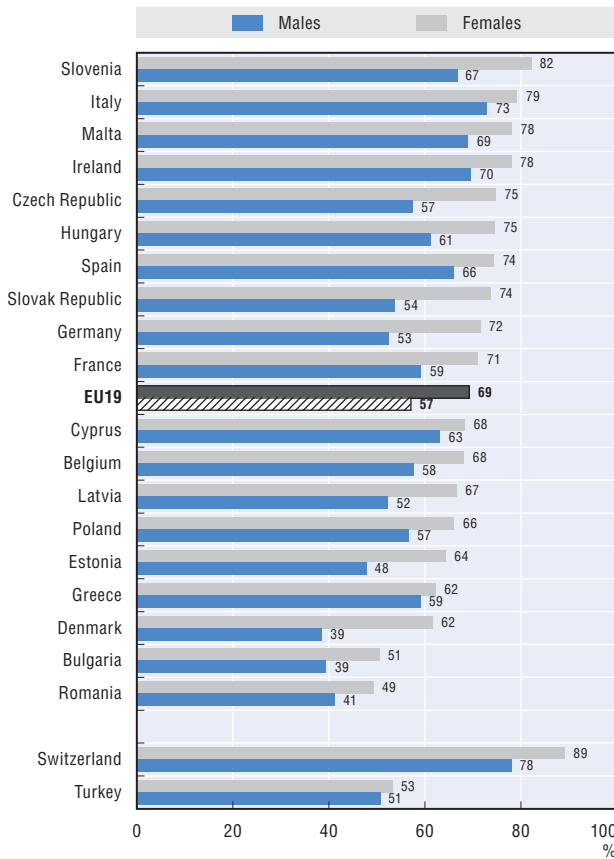
The promotion of fruit and vegetable consumption, especially in schools and the workplace, features in the EU platform for action on diet, physical activity and health, a forum for European-level organisations, ranging from the food industry to consumer protection NGOs, willing to commit to tackling current trends in diet and physical activity (EC, 2011a). Policy makers and government representatives share ideas and best practice on the promotion of fruit and vegetable consumption in the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity.

Definition and comparability

Estimates of daily fruit and vegetable consumption are derived from national and European Health Interview Survey questions, conducted in many EU member states between 2006 and 2010. Typically, respondents were asked “How often do you eat fruit (excluding juice)?” and “How often do you eat vegetables or salad (excluding juice and potatoes)?” Response categories included: Twice or more a day/Once a day/Less than once a day but at least four times a week/Less than four times a week, but at least once a week/Less than once a week/Never.

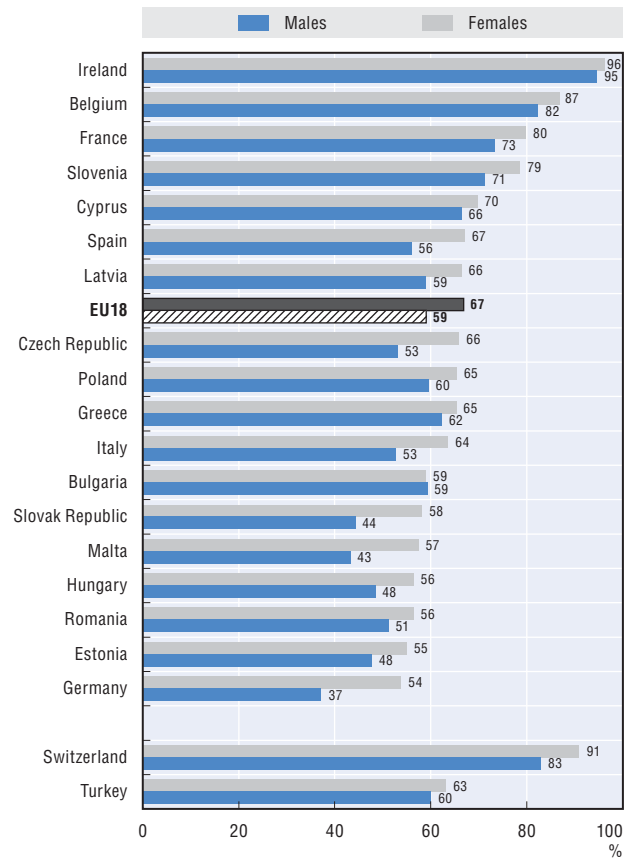
Data for France and Switzerland include juices, soups and potatoes. Data rely on self-report, and are subject to errors in recall. The same survey also asked for information on age, sex and educational level. Data are not age-standardised, with aggregate country estimates representing crude rates among respondents aged 15 years and over in all countries, except Germany which is 18 years and over.

2.8.1. Daily fruit eating among adults, 2008 (or nearest year)



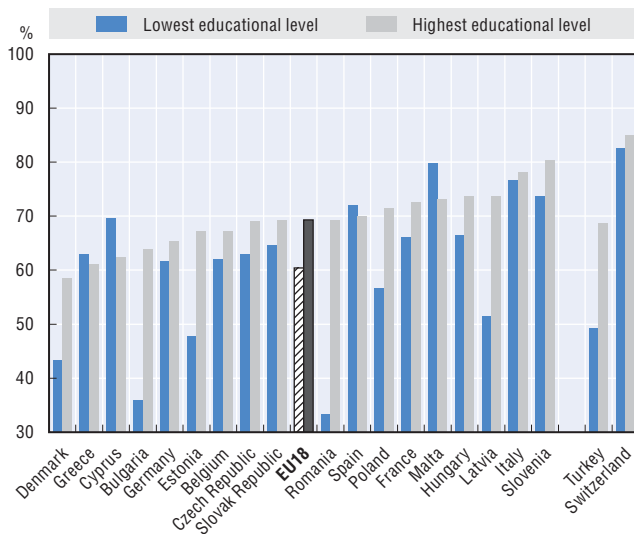
Source: Eurostat Statistics Database and national health interview surveys.
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932704114>

2.8.2. Daily vegetable eating among adults, 2008 (or nearest year)



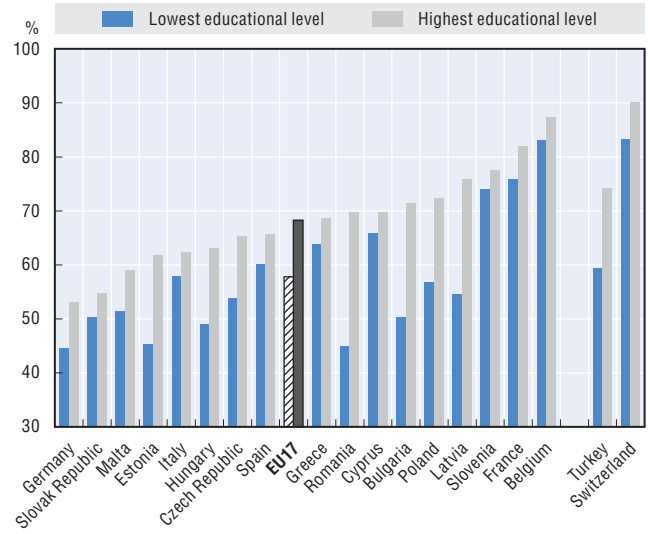
Source: Eurostat Statistics Database and national health interview surveys.
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932704133>

2.8.3. Daily fruit eating among adults, by educational level, 2008 (or nearest year)



Source: Eurostat Statistics Database and national health interview surveys.
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932704152>

2.8.4. Daily vegetable eating among adults, by educational level, 2008 (or nearest year)



Source: Eurostat Statistics Database and national health interview surveys.
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932704171>