

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 chronic conditions, including hypertension, cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes and certain cancers. The 2007 EU Strategy on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related Health Issues promotes a balanced diet and active lifestyle among all the population. The WHO recommends adults consume five portions (400g) of fruit and vegetables daily, excluding starches.

The percentage of adults reporting to consume fruit daily varied from less than 40% in Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania, to more than 70% in Italy and Portugal (Figure 4.19). On average across EU member states, 57% of adults reported eating fruit daily. Women are eating fruit more often than men in all countries, with the largest gender gaps in Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland and Sweden, as well as Iceland and Switzerland. In many Mediterranean countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey), the gender gap is much smaller.

Daily vegetable consumption ranged from less than 30% in Romania, to nearly 80% in Belgium (Figure 4.20). The average across the 28 EU countries was just over 50% (51%). Again, more women reported eating vegetables daily. The gender gap is greatest in Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and Sweden. Patterns of vegetable consumption among age groups and educational groups are similar to those for fruit. Older people more commonly eat fruit and vegetables daily.

About 12% of adults report to eat a least five fruit and vegetables per day across the European Union as a whole, ranging from about 4% in Romania and Bulgaria to 25% in Denmark and the Netherlands (Figure 4.21). People with a higher level of education also tend to eat fruit and vegetables more often compared to those with lower level of education. About 14% of adults with higher level of education consume at least 5 fruits and vegetables per day, compared to 10% in those with lower level of education, on average across 25 EU countries. These social disparities are large in Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal and Estonia.

The availability of fruit and vegetables is the major determinant of consumption. According to FAO data, 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 at the workplace, is a policy objective of the European Union. It features in the EU

platform for action on diet, physical activity and health, a forum for European-level organisations including the food industry, consumer protection NGOs and other stakeholders committed to improving trends in diet and physical activity (European Commission, 2013b). The European Commission is also monitoring progress in the consumption of fruit and vegetables as one of a number of ways to offset a worsening trend of poor diets and low physical activity (European Commission, 2013a). The WHO European Food and Nutrition Action Plan 2015-20, adopted in 2014 by 53 countries of the WHO European Region, is intended to significantly reduce the burden of preventable diet-related non-communicable diseases, obesity and all other forms of malnutrition still prevalent in the WHO European region.

Definition and comparability

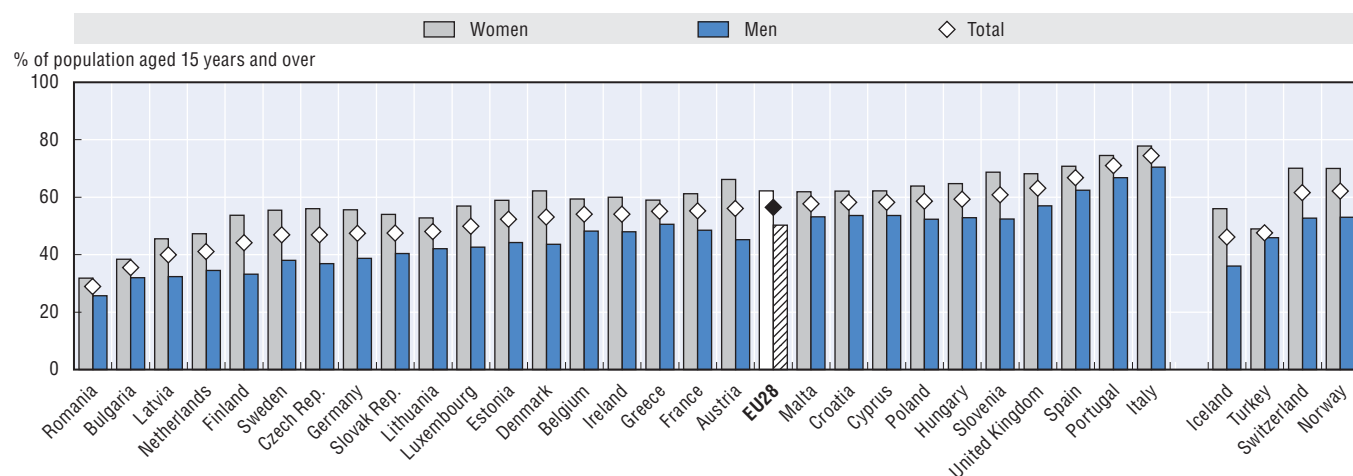
Estimates of daily fruit and vegetable consumption are derived from the European Health Interview Survey wave 2, conducted in many EU member states in 2014. Typically, respondents were asked “How often do you eat fruit (excluding juice)?” and “How often do you eat vegetables or salad (excluding juice 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. The quantity of fruits and vegetables consumed is not known. Data rely on self-report and are subject to errors in recall.

Education level is based on the ISCED 2011 classification. Lowest education level refers to people who have a lower secondary education or below (ISCED 0-2). Highest education level refers to people who have tertiary education (ISCED 6-8).

References

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- European Commission (2013a), *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity Related Health Issues – Final Report*, Directorate-General for Health and Consumers, Brussels.
- European Commission (2013b), *EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. 2013 Annual Report*, European Commission, Brussels.

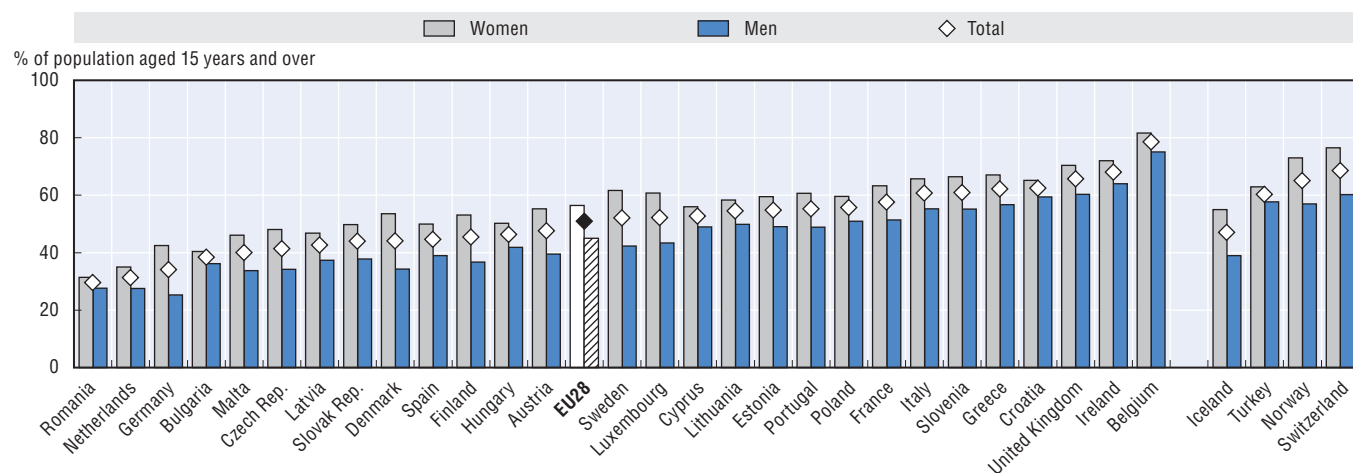
4.19. Daily fruit eating among adults, 2014 (or latest year)



Source: Eurostat, EHS 2014; OECD Health Statistics 2016 for non-EU countries, Ireland and Italy.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933429102>

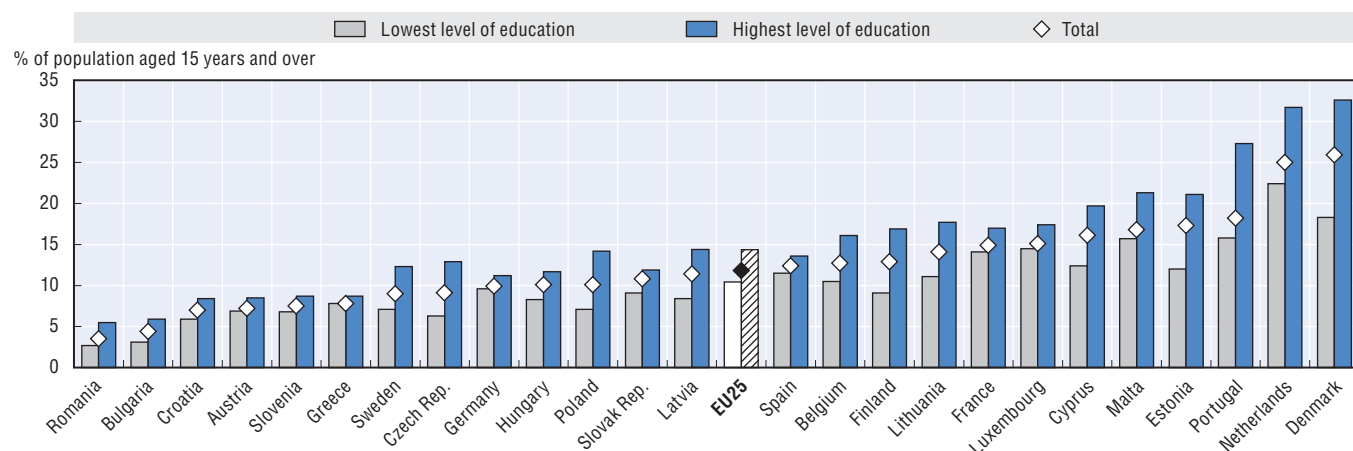
4.20. Daily vegetable eating among adults, 2014 (or latest year)



Source: Eurostat, EHS 2014; OECD Health Statistics 2016 for non-EU countries, Ireland and Italy.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933429114>

4.21. Adults who consume at least five fruit and vegetables daily in EU countries, by education, 2014



Source: Eurostat, EHS 2014.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933429129>



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