



Best-ReMaP
Healthy Food for a Healthy Future

D7.4 EU harmonized Framework for action

Grant Agreement Number 951202

WP 7 NIJZ team

29 / September / 2023



This **report** was funded by the European Union's Health Programme (2014-2020)

Contents

Contributors and Acknowledgements 2

Abbreviations 2

Introduction 3

Executive summary 4

D7.4 EU harmonized Framework for action 5

Wrap up – conclusions 11

Content of figures

Figure 1: WP7 Framework scheme 10

The content of this **report** represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility; it cannot be considered to reflect the views of the European Commission and/or the European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA) or any other body of the European Union. The European Commission and the Agency do not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

Contributors and Acknowledgements

The coordination of this report was overseen by the leaders of WP7, specifically the Slovenian National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ) (Mojca Gabijelčič, Neža Fras, Monika Robnik Levart, Petra Ožbolt, Lea Raztesen, Petra Kravos). We wish to emphasize the invaluable contributions made towards the preparation of the materials addressed in this document. Therefore, we extend our gratitude to all WP7 partners who played a pivotal role in providing guidance for policy implementation measures of the D7.4 EU Framework for action.

Additionally, we express our sincere gratitude to Betina Bergmann Madsen from CPH-MUN, to Wim Debeuckelaere from DG SANTE and to Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia - Chamber of Agricultural and Food Enterprises (Jana Ramuš, Barbara Lončarek) for their invaluable contributions to our WP7 work.

Abbreviations

EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
MSs	Member States
NIJZ	National Institute of public health Slovenia
PFP	Public food procurement
PPFCS	Public procurement of food and catering services
SME	Small and medium Enterprises
WP	Work Package
CCIS – CAFE	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia - Chamber of Agricultural and Food Enterprises
CPH-MUN	Copenhagen Municipality

Introduction

The D7.4 WP7 EU harmonized Framework for action was developed by drawing upon the knowledge and experience gathered throughout the Best ReMaP project's duration and the efforts of all partners within WP7 (Poland, Finland, Austria, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, Greece, Denmark, Hungary, Malta¹). Countless discussions, workshops, inter-sectoral meetings, policy dialogues, roundtable sessions, monthly meetings, Case studies report, and all other activities (all information available on Best ReMaP intranet) associated with WP7 played a significant role in shaping this Framework. WP7 core team made diligent efforts to consider all feedback and suggestions from MSs and WP4.

The D7.4 EU harmonized Framework is intended as a recommendation to all MSs for what policy actions should be implemented in the field of public procurement of food and catering services, based on the experience raised in the Best ReMaP, especially in the WP7.

¹ Austria: Bundesministerium Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz (Judith Benedics); Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (Christian Luipersbeck and Sophie Hesina); The Austrian National Public Health Institute (Gabriele Gruber, Sandra Ecker and Manuel Hinterberger)
Republic of Srpska: PHI Institute for Public Health of the Republic of Srpska (Dragana Stojisavljević);
Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Institute for Public Health of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Aida Filipović Hadžiomerađić and Sanela Tukulija)
Bulgaria: National Center of Public Health and Analyses (Ekatarina Chikova-Iscener and Vesselka Duleva)
Denmark: Copenhagen Municipality (Betina Bergmann Madsen, Mette Svendgaard Høgholm and Dennis Lars Olof Steffensen)
Finland: Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (Heli Kuusipalo, Susanna Raulio and Eeva Rantal)
Greece: Institute of Child Health, Department of Social and Developmental Paediatrics (Venetia-Maria Vraila and Eleftheria Papachristou)
Hungary: National Institute of Pharmacy and Nutrition of Hungary (Anita Varga and Leonóra Zámbo)
Malta: Ministry for Health - Department Health Regulation (Charlene Vassallo)
Poland: Medical University of Silesia in Katowice (Katarzyna Brukało)

Executive summary

The WP7 EU Framework Proposal outlines recommendations for a comprehensive plan to improve and align the public procurement of food and catering services (PPFCS) implementation actions within the European Union.

Key points of the framework include:

- **Analysis of Legislation and Strategy:** The need to examine both EU and national legislation governing PPFCS to identify areas for improvement and best practices. Challenges in implementing PPFCS across different countries are highlighted.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Emphasis on establishing a network of stakeholders, including industry representatives and procurement professionals, to work collaboratively with public health officials and promote transparency, based on the public health goals.
- **EU and National Networks:** Encouragement for EC to establish the EU PFP officers network, for MSs to establish national networks; for MSs to nominate the national focal points to EC, which will facilitate collaboration, knowledge transfer and alignment of actions.
- **Knowledge Building:** Recognizing the importance of strengthening expertise in public procurement through knowledge sharing, resources, and cooperation.
- **Mandatory Criteria:** The Framework suggests setting mandatory minimum criteria for sustainable public food procurement, covering ecological, financial, and social aspects. Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms are essential.
- **EU-Level Database:** Discussion of establishing an EU-level food product database, linked to other nutrition policies, to evaluate the health and environmental impact of foods and procurement practices.
- **Public Procurement Tool:** The need for an efficient tool to simplify tracking of legislation and guidelines, reduce paperwork, especially for market analyses, and enhance transparency in the PPFCS process.
- **Regular Evaluations:** Emphasis on regular evaluations of initiatives, ensuring evidence-based decision-making and allowing for improvements.

In summary, the WP7 Framework outlines a comprehensive strategy to align and improve public food procurement practices across the EU, with a focus on transparency, sustainability, and stakeholder collaboration.

D7.4 EU harmonized Framework for action

In 2014, the total social food service market was estimated at €82 billion, which means that the public procurement system has huge potential to influence the use of public funds within the public health-driven policy agenda (Caldeira et al., 2017)

The current implementation of public procurement of food and catering services (PPFCS) across EU MS is very diverse and not always fully transparent (despite the fact that EU legislation is the same for all countries). Therefore, WP7 activities aim to achieve greater alignment in the implementation of legislation, to add information, knowledge and insights to increase the transparency in the PPFCS field to enable mainly schools and kindergartens in EU the access to high-quality, healthy and nutritious food (in some MS also children's hospitals and refugee camps).

1. Overview/situation analyses² on the existing EU and national legislation, related to public procurement of foods, strategy

To initiate the process, it is imperative to undertake an examination of both the legislation and the landscape pertaining to PPFCS within individual countries. This entails an in-depth exploration of both European and domestic legislation governing PPFCS, with particular attention directed towards discerning efficacious practices and identifying areas warranting improvements.

The implementation of PPFCS involves a range of governance and institutional mechanisms in different countries. Experience shows that countries use a mix of centralized and decentralized approaches to organizing PPFCS, often taking into account different authorities and different types of institutions. MSs also differ in utilizing either direct food procurement or contracted catering services or both to furnish meals and oversee food and beverage provisions within public institutions. Challenges in analyzing the PPFCS legislation can encompass issues like the absence of a unified authority for PPFCS, non-binding documentation, limited sector cooperation, unfamiliarity with procurement procedures, low implementation experience, lack of institutional engagement, inadequate data availability, language barriers, complexity in national legislation, varying procurement practices, and limited relevance of competent institutions.

The key elements in contributing to this process are facilitating elements such as informative resources, national working groups, active stakeholder engagement, well-established contacts with multiple sectors etc.

² Deliverable D7.1 of the Joint Action Best-ReMaP provided *brief initial* overview of the existing EU and national legislation related to public procurements of foods in the (10) participating Member States. Mentioned document was prepared at the initial stage of the JA.

2. Identification of sectors and stakeholders, establishment of the national inter-sectoral body, stakeholder engagement

When a relatively clear picture is created regarding the state of the landscape and legislation, related to PPFCS, the exploration should be extended (in parallel) to networking (identification of relevant sectors and stakeholders, exploring already existing established relationships and creating new ones), followed by the establishment of the national inter-sectoral body.

Public health officials might sometimes face difficulties in establishing constructive engagement with industry stakeholders. To address this concern, it could be beneficial to consider the adoption of an approach that involves addressing interest groups at the EU level and incorporating stakeholder input. Such a top-down approach could aid Member States in identifying and engaging with relevant interest groups based on mutual understanding. By harmonizing this top-level strategy with a bottom-up approach, industry representatives would have a clear point of reference, thereby enhancing the efficacy of their interactions with public health officials. Procurement professionals are an essential stakeholder group here, as they are the actors that communicate with the industry and suppliers during the competitive tendering process, have existing relations with the industry or suppliers and are familiar with procurement processes and regulation,

It is imperative that all parties work together with public health-driven goals. Building a network of stakeholders is crucial to achieving the set goals, as it enables effective collaboration. Simultaneous engagement of different stakeholder groups can have several advantages: the potential for efficient use of resources; foster teamwork and alliance and long-term relationships; the impact of individual stakeholders' actions can be enhanced and innovative ideas that lead to changes for the common good of society. They can bring together actors from diverse fields and it helps to establish a levelled playing field for all stakeholders.

Inter-sectoral cooperation's added value lies in gaining insights from diverse stakeholders, facilitating knowledge transfer on PPFCS, co-creating a healthier environment, facilitating interdisciplinary networking, creating opportunities for fruitful discussions, awareness raising, and (in)formal networking. The value also includes shared perspectives, reflections, and learning experiences that contribute to improving PPFCS systems and initiating changes for better results.

3. Establishment of an EU Public food procurement officers network, identification of National Focal Points

When a good inter-sectoral cooperation is established within the individual country, networking can be extended internationally. Establishing the existing EU PFP officers network is a great opportunity for local, regional, national and international collaboration. PPFCS experts from individual countries can therefore join the European PPFCS officers network, established by Denmark (contact mail address: BUFKP_EUPPFCSNetwork@kk.dk), which meets several times a year. Presentations of various practices, sharing of experiences, problems, potential solutions, presentations of various experts in the PPFCS are a part of the network's meetings. Moreover, it is highly appreciated if each country possesses a well-established national/regional/local network of PPFCS officers, facilitating connections at the national level.

Apart from joining/creating networks, each MS should also appoint one national contact point, i.e. a person or a group of officials employed in the competent ministry (or ministries), which cover public procurement topics), who will represent the link between the European and national levels of legislation and knowledge transfer. The task of establishing and maintaining inter-sectoral contacts can present certain challenges. It would therefore be advantageous for the European Commission to provide guidance to Member States to designate a national focal point for public food procurement of food and catering services to collaborate with public food procurement officers and lawyers in individual countries. The approach to identifying relevant EU contact focal points for PPFCS can vary. Selecting proficient individuals who are already engaged in PPFCS responsibilities and possess a willingness to actively participate, as well as exhibit proficiency in spoken and written English, appears to be the most pragmatic approach. The aim is to establish sustainable, trusted and transparent connections and ensure representation in PPFCS discussions at the European level.

4. Knowledge building in public food procurement

It is imperative for Member States to bolster their expertise and understanding throughout all phases of the public procurement process. The EU PPFCS Network and the National Focal Points Network serve as invaluable platforms for the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and exemplary practices.

It's crucial for Member States to strengthen their know-how in public procurement. Efforts should focus on sharing information, guiding individuals to more resources, fostering inter-sectoral cooperation, and facilitating frequent collaborative gatherings. Building knowledge fosters creativity and innovation, enables more effective problem-solving, promotes adaptability, effective communication: expertise building etc. Overall, knowledge building is a cornerstone for personal, professional, and organizational development.

5. Mandatory minimum criteria for public food procurement (healthy, sustainable, equitable)

Following the previous steps, mandatory minimum criteria should be set for sustainable procurement of catering services and food. The criteria should consider ecological, financial, and social dimensions of sustainability, including nutritional quality criteria for foods and meals served in public catering services as specified in national dietary guidelines. The criteria must be carefully formulated to ensure feasibility in varying contexts. In addition, the criteria should be accompanied with monitoring requirements to ensure successful implementation. Such monitoring should cover the nutritional quality of procured foods and meals served for customers. Enforcing the application of criteria would be most efficient and straightforward through well-established governance structures.

Reaching significant progress in food production necessitates a driving force, as voluntary measures may prove inadequate. The potential for transformation arises when low-quality products are no longer procured or allowed, prompting food producers to reformulate their products to meet elevated standards.

As a recommendation, it would be beneficial to consider the following when establishing national minimum targets for sustainable public procurement of food and catering services, based on the practical experiences and views from Best-ReMaP MSs:

- **Holistic Approach:** Emphasize a comprehensive approach that considers various dimensions, such as health, sustainability, and equity
- **Diverse Food Groups:** Set specific targets for proportions of different food groups, while addressing climate impact and food waste reduction.
- **Tailored Solutions:** Tailor strategies to local circumstances, taking into account guidelines and quality standards,
- **Clear Terminology:** Align nutritional targets with national recommendations and provide clear definitions for key conceptual terms.
- **Local Engagement:** Promote local producer involvement, support for local markets, and collaboration with health professionals.
- **Comprehensive Assessment:** Before developing and delivering solutions, conduct thorough assessments of each country's situation to ensure feasible and effective implementation.

6. EU level database for public procurement, aligned with food database for other nutrition public policies (i.e. FABLE JRC database)

A Slovene tool for public procurement, Catalogue of foods – pilot English version, is a web-based application that provides the user a range of functionalities: creating separate lots, food products market overview, overview of product certificates, etc. In Best ReMaP WP7, the tool was introduced to all WP7 partners who tested the tool while executing a pilot public tender. During the testing period, selected food product data were collected and could form a part of a common EU-level database for public food procurement in the future, in alignment with food databases for other nutrition policies.

Given the similarity of numerous food products available on the market in some European countries, some WP partners were discussing the opportunity of establishing a common food product database that could be linked to FABLE. Such joint database could save resources, as each product available on the EU market, produced within EU or imported, would have to be uploaded on the database by one actor/MS only. Establishing a unified EU-level database could serve various purposes, such as the evaluation of the healthiness or environmental impact of foods available on the EU market, and procurement practices.

To ensure an effective integration into the FABLE branded foods database, with possible necessary upgrades, it is essential to clearly define the purpose, goals, and structure of the database. Furthermore, determining the most efficient method of and recourses required for collecting and updating data for the part of the database not covered by FABLE (i.e., non-processed foods) is crucial. Ideally, producers and manufacturers would be responsible for entering and maintaining accurate and up-to-date information on their products on the market. Such an approach has proved feasible, for example, in the GS1 product information database that has been developed in collaboration with food industry operators and that is widely used in several EU Member States. This approach ensures that manufacturers have direct control

over the data they provide, enhancing the reliability and timeliness of the information in the database, taking also the responsibility of removing the data of the foods not available on the market any more. JRC seems to be recognized (by the WP7 MSs) as an appropriate host for the EU-level food product database.

The database is to be developed with public funds and it would be imperative that the database could be integrated with already existing databases used in relevant practice areas and that it would feed into the FABLE upgraded database. Failure to do so would render the database useless.

7. Public food procurement tool and documentation

As per the viewpoints of MSs from Best ReMaP, the PPFCS process could be significantly facilitated if PPFCS officers were provided with a mechanism/tool that simplifies the tracking of EU and national legislation and guidelines, reduces time spent on paperwork, enables market overview, has current and accurate information, and overall simplifies the PPFCS process.

An example of such a tool fit for the Slovenian context is the Catalogue of Foods, which has proved beneficial for all stakeholders involved. It serves as a valuable tool for both the food industry and public institutions that procure food. Furthermore, active participation by food producers in the Catalogue enhances their prospects of being chosen for public tender by these public institutes. One of the primary advantages observed from the Catalogue was also the heightened transparency, which proved beneficial to food producers who require the assurance that they too can reap the rewards of such transparency.

An ideal public food procurement tool would have to be, according to the WP7 Mss experiences, easy and intuitive to use, available in local languages, adaptable to the local context by considering all relevant national regulations and recommendations, government programmes and resolutions; freely available to all public organisations and suppliers to enable open and fair competition; up to date; it should incorporate a comprehensive range of filters, criteria, and requirements, enabling users to customize and apply specific parameters according to their needs etc.

Every action proposal should prioritize the simplification of the legislative procedures of public food procurement while also striving to attract a greater number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and local farmers. Additionally, proposals should include training and improved management techniques for farmers to encourage their participation in procuring food, which is also a part of the capacity building mentioned in step 4.

8. Regular evaluations and recommendations for upgrading sustainable policy development

Any (newly) established initiative should undergo an evaluation, which has several advantages, such as providing actual data and insights that allow decisions about the initiative's (dis)continuation/modification (evidence-based decision making), accountability, learning and improvement, transparency, resource allocation etc.

For implementing PPFCS, it is essential to prioritize the consideration of local environments when formulating recommendations. It is recommended that a critical evaluation of the types of goals, processes, and systems that are practicable and useful for alignment be conducted. Such an evaluation would entail analyzing which process goals can be effectively aligned and harmonized.

The aim should be to establish sufficiently higher-level goals that serve as general targets for sustainable procurement of food and catering services, while still affording Member States and local experts the autonomy to customize these goals and actions taken to reach the goals to suit their individual requirements.

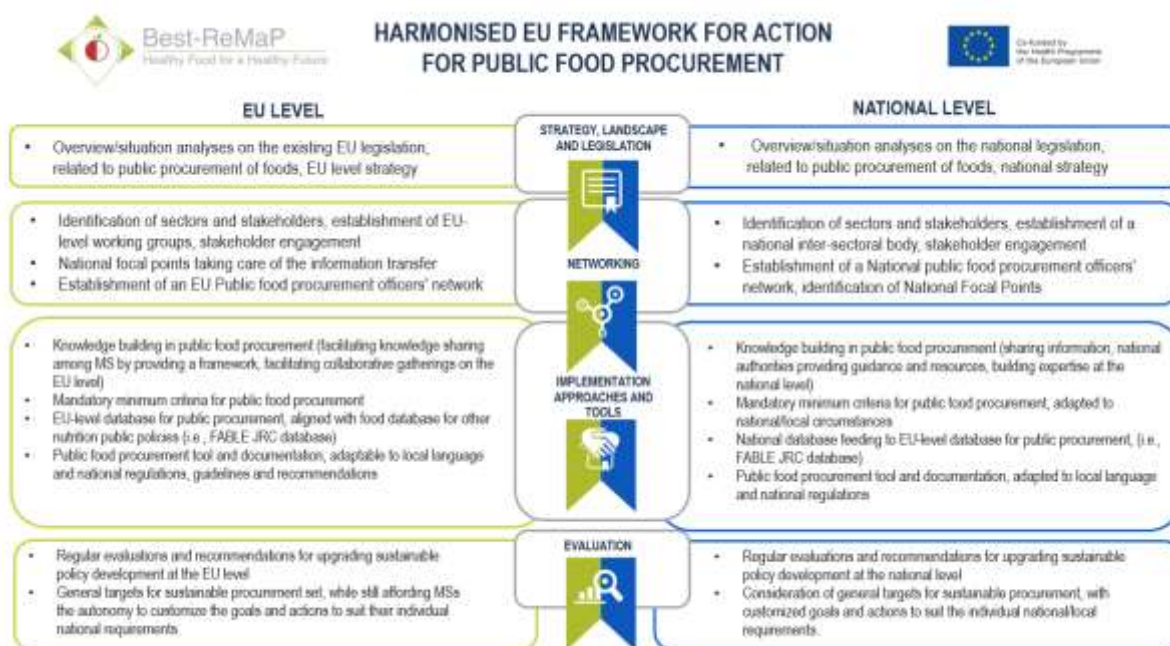


Figure 1: WP7 Framework scheme

Most of the foreseen WP7 Framework steps were divided on 2 different levels – EU and national level, on the basis of planned activities at the EU and national level.

Wrap up – conclusions

The WP7 EU Framework for action is a recommendation compiled on the basis of 3 years of extensive experience in the field of public food procurement.

This D7.4 Framework for Action will offer direction for the implementation of public procurement of food and catering services policies in EU Member States and will enable periodic revisions through the EU HLG after the completion of this Joint Action, ensuring continuous support for sustainability. This Framework will also be used as a basis for the new JA Prevent NCD Task 5.4 as well.

References

- Caldeira S., Storcksdieck S., Bakogiannis I., Gauci C., Calleja A., Furtado A. 2017. Public Procurement of Food for Health, Technical report on the school setting. Joint publication of the Maltese presidency and the European Commission: 86 p.
<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/353747>
<https://www.oecd.org/health/health-systems/Heavy-burden-of-obesity-Policy-Brief-2019.pdf>