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Assessment of consumer exposure to nutrition information on food labels: penetration study across the twenty-seven EU member states (EU-27) plus Turkey

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Food Labelling to Advance Better Education for Life (FLABEL) is a project funded under the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme. Its objective is to understand how nutrition information on food labels affects dietary choices and consumer habits. Fundamental to this objective is the assessment of current exposure of consumers to nutrition information on food labels. At present, few data exist on the penetration of nutrition information on food labels in Europe, with previous studies involving only a small subset of countries and not looking at all products within a product category⁽¹⁾.

The present study aimed at designing and conducting a reproducible audit, assessing the current penetration of nutrition information on food labels in various product categories in the EU-27 plus Turkey and to identify the major ways in which nutrition information is provided on labels.

In each of the twenty-seven EU countries plus Turkey three types of retailers were chosen for the audit: a retailer within the top five in terms of market share; a national retailer or consumer cooperative; a discounter. The product categories examined were sweet biscuits, breakfast cereals, ready meals, carbonated soft drinks and yoghurts. A data collection grid was designed to record where nutrition information occurred on the pack (front of pack *v.* elsewhere), in which format it was given (e.g. nutrition table), which nutrients were covered and whether nutrition or health claims were present.

The majority of products in these five categories in all countries contained nutrition information of some kind (highest in the UK and Republic of Ireland, lowest in Eastern European countries). The most widespread format across all countries was the nutrition table on back of pack, stating either the main four (energy, protein, carbohydrates, fat) or the main eight (main four plus sugar, saturated fat, fibre and salt). Overall, breakfast cereals was the category with the highest penetration of nutrition information. Nutrition claims and guideline daily amounts were the most prevalent front-of-pack forms of nutrition information.

Nutrition information was found on a large majority of products audited and its presence seems higher than reported previously⁽¹⁾. The findings will provide a solid starting ground for subsequent studies involving attention, reading, liking, understanding and use of different nutrition labelling formats.

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1. European Advisory Services (2004) *The Introduction of Mandatory Nutrition Labelling in the European Union: An Impact Assessment*, p. 32. Brussels: DG SANCO; available at http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/nutritionlabel/impact_assessment.pdf