

Surveying and interviewing online food retailers in North Macedonia

Background

Malnutrition, including undernutrition and overnutrition, persists throughout the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region. ECA is making progress overall and is on track to achieve the 2025 and 2030 Sustainable Development Goal Targets 2.2 for child stunting, child wasting and low birth weight in most countries. However, the ECA region will not meet the 2025 and 2030 targets without further effort regarding childhood (0-5) overweight, adult obesity (in all countries in the region), anaemia (in all countries of the region) and exclusive breastfeeding (in some countries of the region).

What we eat and how we eat are key drivers of malnutrition in the ECA region and across the globe. The modern food retail environment in Europe and Central Asia has grown massively in the last decades, progressively expanding the quantity and variety of food choices at the point of purchase and diversifying strategies to increase consumption. An appealing approach that allows for greater profit margins includes filling stores with ultra-processed products that are high in calories, sugar, fats, and sodium, which are harmful to health. Low manufacturing cost, easy packaging, long shelf life, convenience, and hyper palatability, make these products attractive for retailers. This is becoming problematic considering that the consumption of these foods has been tied to overweight, obesity and diet related non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and others. Food manufacturers and retailers are central to cost, type, and availability of food, directly impacting the options that are available for consumers.

Online food retail environments are becoming increasingly prevalent as food systems transform and modernise. These give access to food retail from any location in a seamless and convenient manner. More and more, consumers throughout the world are purchasing their food from online outlets, and the marketing practices employed by online retailers have an increasing effect on what families eat. Online food retail outlets across the world use a range of marketing strategies to promote foods to influence purchases, including through use of discounts, product placements and other marketing techniques.

In Europe and Central Asia, there is little evidence regarding online food retail environments and if they promote healthy and/ or unhealthy behaviours and dietary choices.

Hence, to better understand food retailer practices as they relate to food environments, with focus on school age children and their families in Europe and Central Asia region, the Regional Office is launching this two-phased consultancy. Specifically, UNICEF seeks to understand the food retail marketing environment for online food retailers in North Macedonia.

Objective

To gain an understanding of online food retail marketing environments in North Macedonia.

Scope of work

This institutional consultancy is composed of two major phases:

1. The **first phase** of the project will involve an assessment of the online food retail marketing environment using the INFORMAS protocol for monitoring marketing practices for foods and beverages within online grocery stores (developed by the Deakin team and currently being tested in 30+ countries). The protocol captures information on product, price, promotion, placement, and personalization. There will be scope for adaptation of the protocol in consultation with the North Macedonia UNICEF country office and consultant. In line with the minimal approach outlined in the INFORMAS protocol, in each country the assessment will involve assessment of retailers that combined account for at least 25% of the online grocery market share (with a minimum of 2 retailers) or, if the market is dispersed, of five of the largest retailers whose combined share of the online grocery market is less than 25%. In reporting of the findings of the assessment, the retailers assessed will not be named. The consultant will work with the Deakin University team to select the most appropriate online retailers for use with the assessment tool and will be required to complete data collection. They will be supported by the Deakin University team to collect the data through training and ad hoc support.
2. The **second phase** of the project will involve interviewing retailers to understand retailer perceptions of the barriers and enablers to creating a healthy food retail marketing environment. The consultant will recruit (with UNICEF and Deakin support) and interview 8-10 retail staff working at large online retail outlets in North Macedonia. The Deakin University team will provide the consultant with the interview questions and will support the consultant throughout the data collection period through training and ad hoc support.

Key tasks:

1. Using the INFORMAS protocol for online food retail environments, collect data relating to product, price, promotion, placement and personalization of foods and beverages sold online.
2. Interview food retailers on barriers and enablers to healthy online food retail environments.
3. Translate and transcribe interview recordings as necessary.

Deliverables

Deliverables	Indicator	Duration
Data from online food retail assessment	Excel spreadsheet reflecting data as outlined in the INFORMAS protocol for online food retail environments	6 days
Interview transcripts (in English)	8-10 interview transcripts translated and transcribed to English	14 days

Management and organisation

The consultancy will be home-based and will work under the supervision of the Deakin University project team.

Minimum requirements

Education:

- Bachelor's degree in nutrition, public health, or related field

Knowledge, Expertise, Skills, and Experience:

- Experience for at least five years in Public Health or Nutrition is desirable.
- Previous experience in conducting qualitative research is desirable.
- Highly developed communication skills.
- Knowledge of Macedonian and English languages; knowledge of Albanian is an advantage.
- Good analytical and organizational skills.
- Ability to work independently and respond to feedback in a timely and professional manner.

Budget and terms of payment

The consultancy fee shall be paid according to the above matrix and upon approval of relevant deliverables by UNICEF.

Conditions of work

The consultant shall use their own facilities to manage the work.

The assignment is home-based with no travel envisaged. The consultant will work directly with the Deakin University team and UNICEF staff in ECARO and country offices through remote means.

No work or travel may commence until the contract is signed by both UNICEF and the consultant.

Contacts

Lead investigator: Kathryn Backholer, Deakin University (kathryn.backholer@deakin.edu.au)

Co-lead investigator: Oliver Huse, Deakin University (oliver.huse@deakin.edu.au)