

CoP Compact #10 Session Summary

Living Lab Prilep

Transforming Early Childhood

Nutrition - Adela Gjorgjioska, Arete

26.03.2025



Case description

- North Macedonia has been faced with a changing food system context in which agricultural output has been declining due to the lack of good agricultural practices, urbanization and increasing import dependence. Simultaneously, the population of North Macedonia faces increasing rates of obesity, structural food poverty and inflated food prices.
- **Arete**, a local NGO, identified kindergartens as a promising target for interventions related to improved diets due to the life-long impact that good nutrition and food education can have on this age group.
- Content Development: In collaboration with the Ministry of Labour & Social Affairs (responsible for kindergartens) and UNICEF, Arete spearheaded efforts to develop content that can be used for teaching children about food and health at kindergartens. This resulted in the 'Magic Plate' manual for kindergarten staff and two children's characters that could be used to teach these topics in an entertaining way.
- Roll-out: Over 2800 kindergarten staff across the country have been trained using the Magic Plate manual. During these training workshops, the perceptions of healthy & unhealthy foods among kindergarten staff was also researched, in addition to the menus on offer at kindergartens. These perceptions and menus have also been researched post-intervention with the Magic Plate, the outcomes of which will soon be analyzed.

Take-home lessons

- Gaining trust and recognition as a new partner takes time. Once this is established, projects move much faster.
- Working with large (governmental) institutions requires good navigation of expertise gaps. For example, the Min. Of Labour & Social Affairs had a working group on the topic of food, though this was focused primarily on food safety and not on nutrition and sustainability. Therefore, expertise on nutrition and sustainability had to be sourced from other partners, requiring the right knowledge and resources. A willingness to offer time and resources for interventions is a key factor in engaging partners that are otherwise too limited in their resources. Put simply: offering resources gets you taken more seriously.
- Managing multi-partner expectations can be time consuming. Ensure that the communications and goals of the different partners are clear when it comes to the output and dissemination of materials.
- Policy briefs will be used as a tool for ensuring that the interventions remain feasible on a practical level. For example, changing a kindergarten menu requires different items for procurement. Public procurement can be very challenging due to great financial restrictions at the kindergartens (budget of €30/child/month for food) and tender restrictions. Addressing this at policy level would be of long-term benefit for creating an enabling environment for the intervention actions to continue.



The Magic Plate Manual (available in Macedonian & Albanian translations)

Discussion

Q: How did the (1) kindergartens and (2) stakeholders in general respond to you putting the topic of food & health on the agenda? **A:** (1) The kindergarten staff were enthusiastic, but we could identify two main groups: Firstly, the carers who are dealing with the basic needs of the children were somewhat skeptical of how the Magic Plate and better kindergarten meals would help. Secondly, the pedagogical staff who were convinced of the concept and were interested in the tools and materials to implement the Magic Plate. (2) On a wider level, people were enthusiastic about the project and the topic of obesity and nutrition. This was a new, concrete issue that is relevant across all ethnic groups and is visible in society. The need for action on this issue was already identified by our partners, stimulated by an outbreak of Salmonella at a kindergarten which drew attention to the topic of food at kindergartens. But previously the resources to address the issue of food more broadly (not only on food safety) was not yet possible due to resource limits.

Q: This [see Q above] highlights the role of contingency in these projects. A project can create the structure for interventions, but the circumstances, such as this outbreak, generate the impulse for action. Do you have an idea of the impacts so far and what you will do with the results? **A:** The pre- and post-intervention perceptions of (un)healthy foods will soon be analyzed. We plan to increase visibility by circulating these outcomes in the media and creating a campaign to bring the topic to the public sphere. We also aim to digitalise some of the Magic Plate content and put it on the UNICEF app which is available to parents.

Q: Were the kitchen staff of kindergartens also involved in the workshops? **A:** Yes, and at the Prilep municipality we would like to organize an annual MasterChef style competition for kindergarten chefs to showcase their menus and receive rewards for their efforts in cooking healthy and sustainable food. We hope this will be an entertaining way to keep the topic on the agenda at the Municipality and at kindergartens.

Q: Which topics do you intend to address next? **A:** We will stay with the kindergarten age group and continue our efforts here. Addressing food at primary and secondary schools would require us to collaborate with a different ministry and other regulations. This is a different ball game in our context and is not within our scope.

Comment: School Food for Change could be a good partner for collaboration

Comment: Collaboration with local producers remains challenging due to the public procurement regulations. This would require intervention at the level of local farmers to ensure they are able to respond to public tenders. Lidl is now entering the North Macedonian market for the first time and intends to train and collaborate with local farmers. This could be a good first step in positive change at producer level when it comes to procurement opportunities.

Attendees

Adela Gjorgjioska, Arete
Dirk Wascher, SusMetro
Poppy Eyre, SusMetro
Andreas Exner, University of Graz
Livia Cepoiu, University of Graz
Brigitte Braun, os4os
Chiara Ferravante, Tuscany Living Lab
Claire Planchat, INRAE
Kathy Belpaeme, Ostend Municipality
Marie Mauer, City of Leuven
Nadia Tonoli, Bergamo Municipality
+2 (anonymous)

Further reading/Annex

[Magic Plate Manual](#)
[School Food for Change](#)

Next CoP events

23rd April 2025 10:00 – 11.00 CEST
CoP 1 Year Anniversary Evaluation Session
Please join us to share your feedback and ideas!
Send your case to copfeast@gmail.com!

FEAST

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Community of Practice Food & Health

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SUSTAINABLE DESIGN FOR METROPOLITAN LANDSCAPES

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