



From Pilots to Policy:

Evidence from Three Years of Implementing the Whole School Food Approach in Europe

(2025–2026 Report)

© Shutterstock



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036763.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

The global food system is not doing what it is supposed to do. Soaring obesity rates, climate impact and increasing supply chain fragility demand urgent, systemic solutions. We need different configurations in our food system that deliver better outcomes: healthy people on a healthy planet.

Rikolto is part of a global momentum, a broad societal coalition of thinkers and doers. Together we envision that securing healthy, sustainable food environments for every child is one of the most potent levers for change available to us. Kickstarting local and global food system transformation with tangible actions on the ground but always keeping our eyes on the real price: long-term health and resilience of people, planet and our economies.

Making systemic change tangible is a challenge because there are no quick wins. The Whole School Food Approach (WSFA), as detailed in this report, is our proven, scalable answer to this. We have documented compelling evidence about the WSFA across twelve European regions and have put together a blueprint.

One important finding is the importance of an integrated food approach, coordinating work on e.g. policy, food, education and community, works a lot better than the siloed approaches we often see today. The potential impact goes well beyond health and consumption, and taps into other systemic barriers, such as livelihoods, environment, governance and equity. All are essential to build more resilient communities and societies. A major concern in these turbulent times.

Another finding in the report resonates with our global experience: **the true obstacle to scaling up is institutional, not ideological.** For the WSFA to transition from a successful pilot to a permanent policy and secure the necessary buy-in from the private sector and farmers, the EU and its Member States must urgently invest in and prioritise strategic and systemic coordination. Changes in policy and business models that drive change must be embedded in the current system, not merely added to it as a 'nice to have'.

Rikolto remains committed to driving this transformation. We urge policymakers and industry leaders to recognise that this report is our shared mandate for the next phase: mainstreaming this proof of concept into standard practice.

By Thibault Geerardyn, Director, Rikolto Europe



© Rikolto

Key insights and policy implications from three years of implementation practice

This report, "From Pilots to Policy: Evidence from Three Years of Implementing the Whole School Food Approach in Europe," is primarily **addressed to local, national, and European policymakers**. It serves as a decisive call to action to move beyond temporary "projects" and toward the structural embedding of sustainable school food systems.

The Whole School Food Approach (WSFA) is a **proven, scalable framework** designed to transform schools into "living laboratories" for change. Following three years of progress across 600 schools in 12 European countries, the evidence confirms that an integrated approach, coordinating policy, food provision, education, and community engagement is far more effective than traditional, siloed methods.

The report demonstrates that, while the WSFA successfully fosters healthy, sustainable habits, its long-term impact is currently hindered by a lack of strategic coordination capacity and a tendency to treat these initiatives as temporary. To transition from successful pilots to permanent reality, policymakers must shift from "nice to have" additions to making these systems a standard, embedded part of institutional policy.



© Shutterstock

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary

Key messages & policy recommendations

Key messages

A WSFA works and inspires

Tangible results across diverse contexts (600+ schools) prove the framework is versatile and effective at driving change.

Beyond the plate

Lasting change requires integrating hands-on food education (gardening, cooking) into the curriculum to drive lifelong behavioural shifts.

The power of coordination

The greatest barrier to scaling is not ideology but institutional coordination; multilevel support is essential for sustainability.

Strategic financial investment

Targeted funding for coordination and start-up costs is a key driver for long-term impact.

Systemic & inclusive

The approach builds resilient food systems that address social inequalities by ensuring every child has access to healthy meals.

Policy recommendations

Integrate into existing policy

Local and national authorities should embed the WSFA framework into current food strategies, sustainability plans, and social policies.

Legislate and standardise

Establish national standards for school meals and integrate food skills/sustainability as core components of national education programmes.

Appoint food coordinators

Establish dedicated roles (food coordinators/working groups) with the time and mandate to oversee implementation at both school and municipal levels.

Allocate dedicated funding

Link financial resources directly to WSFA actions through existing programs like the EU Milk and Fruit Scheme or national food strategies.

Leverage procurement

Integrate educational and sustainability criteria into public procurement contracts so caterers become structural partners in education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary

Policy roadmap for scaling



For local governments

Use the WSFA to align various municipal departments (health, education, agriculture) and provide schools with simple tools to minimise bureaucratic burden.



For regional/national authorities:

Create a stable framework that allows cities to implement sustainable practices, independently of temporary project funding.



For Europe

Prioritise strategic and systemic coordination at the EU level to mainstream the WSFA proof-of-concept into standard practice across all Member States.

Why transforming school food systems matters now.

Real change begins with mindset. The Whole School Food Approach (WSFA) fosters healthy, sustainable habits that last a lifetime. As part of the EU-funded SchoolFood4Change (SF4C) project¹, aligned with EU4Health², the Green Deal³, and the European Child Guarantee⁴, the WSFA offers a holistic framework for healthier, ecologically sustainable, and socially resilient school food systems.

The health challenge

Many children face **health challenges** due to insufficient or unhealthy diets⁵.

- Over one in five adolescents is **overweight or obese**
- Five percent are underweight⁶
- Half do not consume fruit or vegetables daily⁷.

Social inequalities amplify these trends, while climate change adds pressure on food production and systems.

A solution beyond health outcomes

School meals alone can make an important contribution, but lasting change requires education, participation, and hands-on experience. By embedding the WSFA in school action plans and aligning it with local, regional and national policies, school food systems are increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of territorial resilience. Beyond health outcomes, the WSFA aims to contribute to a more resilient food system that can better mitigate shocks caused by climate change, conflicts, and other crises.

Promising results

Since January 2022, SF4C has implemented the WSFA in more than 600 schools across twelve countries. Early results are promising, and the ambition is to make the WSFA a natural and sustainable part of school culture, contributing to the transition towards a healthier and more sustainable food system.



© Pexels

What is the WSFA framework?

The Whole School Food Approach (WSFA) is an integrated framework for improving school food systems, building on earlier initiatives such as Rikolto's GoodFood@School programme⁸, applied since 2017.

Within the EU-funded SchoolFood4Change (SF4C) project, the WSFA was translated into a structured framework with concrete criteria across four pillars:

- A) Policy and Leadership
- B) Food and Sustainability
- C) Education and Learning
- D) Community and Partnership.

This report focuses specifically on the implementation of this framework and formulates policy recommendations for the local, regional, national and European policy level.

A user-oriented tool

By addressing all four pillars simultaneously, schools are encouraged to take a holistic approach to food. Within SF4C, schools are engaged, guided, and monitored by city officials, supported by National Lead Partners (NLPs) who act as technical experts. To enhance the implementation of the WSFA pillars, a [checklist-based framework](#) was developed⁹ in early 2022. This resulted in a user-oriented tool that enables schools to take concrete, integrated actions to offer healthy, sustainable school food.

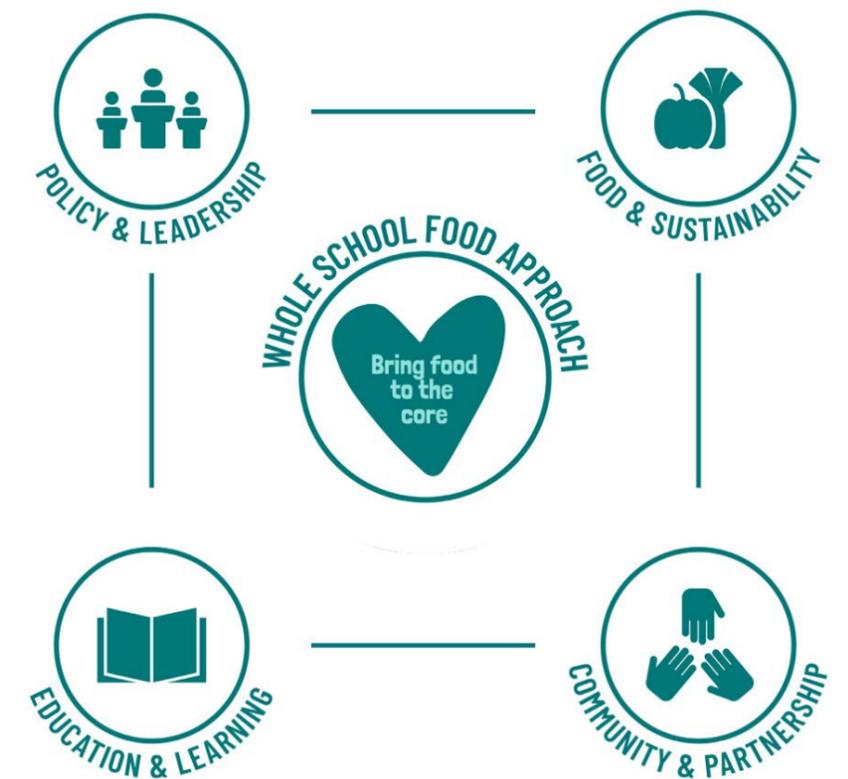


Figure: framework of the Whole School Food Approach and its 4 mutually reinforcing pillars.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Overview of bronze criteria

Pillar A: Policy and Leadership

- A.1. Internal school food working group
- A.2. Baseline measurement and development of an action plan on school nutrition
- A.3. Annual written review of the action plan
- A.4. Communicating the vision regarding nutrition
- A.5. Involvement of students in promoting healthy and sustainable nutrition

Pillar B: Food and Sustainability

- B.1. Eating environment with attention to healthy eating habits
- B.2. Encouraging students to eat more fruit and vegetables at school
- B.3. Information about the school meal menu (if applicable)
- B.4. Free drinkable (tap) water
- B.5. Clear guidelines on lunchboxes and/or snacks for students and caregivers (if applicable)
- B.6. Additional facilities for students with special dietary requirements or needs
- B.7. Monitoring and minimising food waste

Pillar C: Nutrition Education and Learning

- C.1. The topic of healthy nutrition and sustainable food production and consumption is included in various curricula and/or interdisciplinary projects
- C.2. Practical activities related to growing, harvesting, and preparing food
- C.3. Workshops and educational resources for teachers and school staff

Pillar D: Community and Partnership

- D.1. Information for and involvement of parents and caregivers in the school's vision on nutrition and WSFA activities
- D.2. Communication of the school's nutrition vision to the wider community

The path to progress: bronze, silver and gold

The framework is structured into bronze, silver and gold levels. This provides clear guidance for progress and enables recognition through certificates. Schools are free to implement the criteria in ways that suit their specific context.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Refined through pilot testing

The framework was not built in a vacuum. A first pilot phase in 2023 with five schools per city allowed for the refinement of the framework.

The pilot expanded to ten additional schools per city in 2024 and twenty more in 2025. Each year, best practices were documented and shared to foster mutual learning, supported by coaching and networking events.

Key adjustments included:

- Achievable standards: adjusting criteria across levels to ensure minimum standards are reachable across Europe.
- Practical reformulation: shifting focus to the overall availability of healthy food rather than strictly requiring daily hot meals.

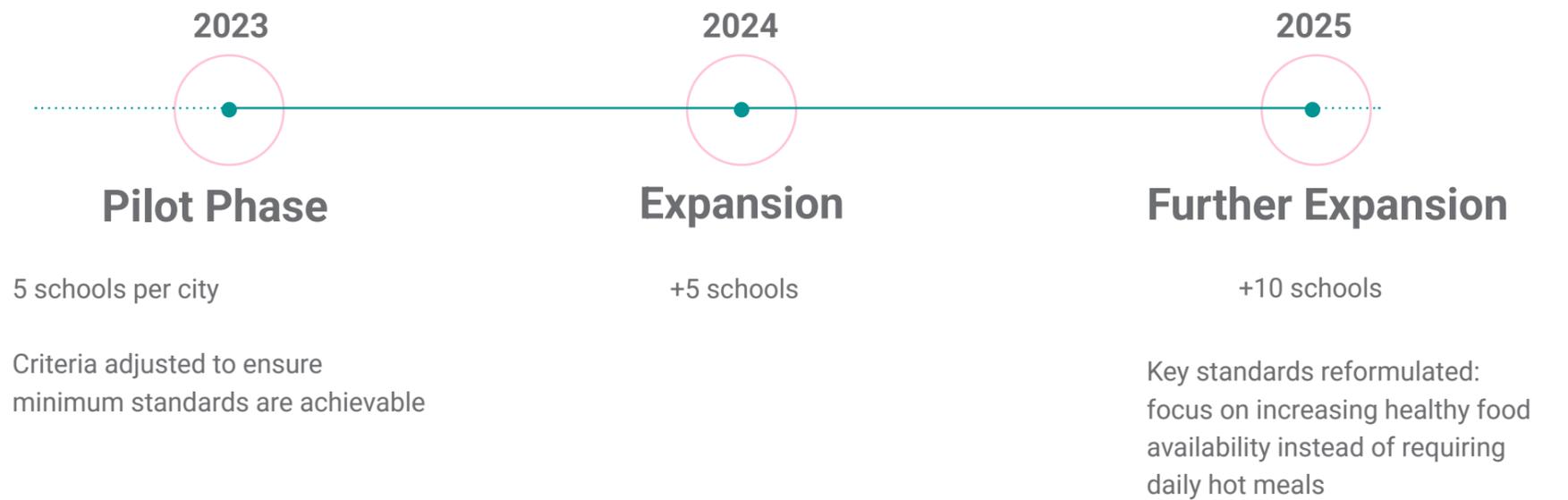


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Key learning questions

To foster a positive food culture in schools and achieve lasting behavioural changes among young people, long-term support for schools is essential. Full implementation of the Whole School Food Approach (WSFA) requires time, strong organisation, dedicated resources, and careful preparation.

This chapter seeks to address how the approach can be optimally supported in the future to secure sustainable results. The discussion is structured around four **critical learning questions**:

Data

This report synthesises the conclusions drawn from three years of implementing the WSFA framework.

Our findings are based on:

- Interviews with city officials and project staff.
- Quantitative data from approximately 200 schools via a Kobo Toolbox survey.
- Evidence supported by academic research.

Note: A detailed overview of the survey data and methodology can be found in the Annex.

QUESTION 1

What is the added value of a European WSFA framework with concrete criteria?

QUESTION 2

What types of support are necessary for successful implementation of the WSFA?

QUESTION 3

What factors enable the effective scale-up of the WSFA: policy recommendations?

QUESTION 4

How can new cities get started?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

What is the added value of a European WSFA framework with concrete criteria?

It works: evidence from over 600 schools

“The Whole School Food Approach is an extremely useful tool.” This is the shared conclusion of 18 cities and regions across 12 countries, which tested the WSFA framework in more than 600 schools over the past four years. It provides a structured way for schools to take action on food, and even modest project budgets proved highly effective in sparking meaningful change.

“The WSFA showed us how a school can develop a coherent food culture – considering ecological, economic, social, and health aspects – and how students can influence their parents through this approach.”

– Základná škola, Slovakia

Impact through innovation

Across participating schools, significant progress has been made in implementing an integrated approach to food.

Around 150 best practices¹¹ have been documented within the project. Examples include student-led vegetable gardens, cooking workshops, and experimentation with local, organic, and plant-based meals.



© Unsplash

Fostering collaboration

Apart from the documented best practices, other activities were undertaken to foster intersectoral and participatory action. An example is the organisation of 288 Farm-to-School Twinnings¹² which were established between schools and local farmers to create educational opportunities. It led students and by extension their families to gain insight into how their food is produced, while farmers discovered schools as a new local market to supply to.

A scalable path: bronze, silver and gold

To ensure these diverse initiatives are both sustainable and measurable, the WSFA framework provides clear criteria for each pillar. By accommodating schools' different starting points, the framework allows for realistic goal-setting. The bronze, silver, and gold scoring system serves as guidance and motivates schools to be ambitious, though not all schools place the same value on formal qualification levels. Schools that engage deeply often report a strong sense of satisfaction upon reaching a qualification level. For local policymakers, the framework also lends legitimacy to their efforts.

Looking ahead

Data on the effectiveness of these higher-level criteria (silver and gold levels) remain limited, as widespread WSFA implementation is still recent. In the coming years, monitoring and evidence gathering will be essential to identify gaps and strengthen support structures, ensuring equitable access for all students and reinforcing the social inclusion goals of the framework.



© Unsplash

It goes beyond the plate

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela, speech at Madison Park High School, Boston, 23 June 1990

As Mandela emphasised, education is key to societal change. This also includes the transition towards a more sustainable food system. Schools are increasingly aware that merely improving the school meal offer is not enough. Research^{13 14 15} also shows that integrating education and training (Pillar C) is a critical driver for building more resilient food systems. Through workshops, field trips, and lessons on food production and processing, students gain insight into where their food comes from and what healthy, environmentally responsible choices entail. A notable example comes from Copenhagen’s potato tender project¹⁵.

“By incorporating an educational component into the procurement process, we required participating farmers to provide learning opportunities. Students received starter kits to grow potatoes in school biology lessons, calculated the land area needed for potato production in math classes, and visited a large-scale farm where potatoes were cultivated. This connected classroom learning directly to real-world food systems.”

Betina Bergmann Madsen, Chief Procurement Officer at Copenhagen Municipality and Team Lead for Strategic Procurement and Food.



© City of Copenhagen

Overcoming the implementation gap

However, embedding food education sustainably remains a challenge in many contexts¹⁶. Even though extensive resources exist on climate change and healthy diets, schools often struggle to navigate them. Without adequate guidance, the extra efforts of committed teachers risk being unsustainable.

To provide more effective support, government agencies or external organisations such as EIT Food Educators¹⁸ can play a central role by reviewing, curating, and disseminating educational materials. Acting as a central hub, these organisations can translate this input into a coherent educational offering aligned with national curricula. This enables schools to confidently achieve minimum learning objectives while simultaneously fostering long-term behavioural change towards healthy eating habits.

It is a systemic approach

The Whole School Food Approach (WSFA) is based on **systems-thinking**: the belief that **sustainable change is only possible when the interconnections between the different parts of a system are strengthened**¹⁸.

In a school context this means that food is more than just what is on the plate. There must be constant interaction between policy, education, the food offering and the community.

Relationships over interventions

.....

A systemic approach therefore does not focus solely on individual interventions, but on the relationships, feedback loops, and interactions between actors such as students, teachers, parents/caregivers, caterers, and local authorities. The goal is behavioural change, leading to the redesign of the entire school food system, resulting in lasting positive effects¹⁹.

Bridging the gap: from fragmented to structural change

.....

Many schools and cities within the project already had initiatives around healthy eating or ecological sustainability, but these were often fragmented or temporary.

The risk: Without an overarching framework, efforts remain isolated actions.

The solution: A systemic approach helps schools and local authorities structurally integrate food into their agenda, working step-by-step towards a resilient food system.

“In Nürnberg, we started with surveys within schools to map out gaps in healthy and sustainable school food systems. The results show that many children come to school without having eaten or having received breakfast. Through the SF4C project, and thanks to support from, among others, the Lions Club, a few schools have now launched breakfast initiatives and attention to providing healthy snacks.”

– Dorothee Everding, former city coordinator SF4C in Nuremberg, Germany

Action through the four pillars

.....

The WSFA translates this systemic vision into practice through four pillars with concrete criteria, which make the interconnections between policy, practice, education, and participation visible. The bronze criteria form the basic requirements for sustainable school food practices. Each of these criteria also includes an indicator that makes achieving the criterion measurable.

It builds connections

A total of 33 on-site coaching sessions were held, involving over 700 participants from multiple municipal departments. These sessions highlighted that working on school food is a complex, multilayered task.

Departments including health, education, development co-operation, poverty reduction, agriculture, and public procurement each approach the topic from their own perspectives and responsibilities.

A key insight was that the coaching sessions often acted as a catalyst for internal collaboration. They provided the first opportunity for staff to connect across policy domains, get to know each other, and formulate shared ambitions.

"Building on the Smakelijke Scholen initiative, we engaged with Antwerp city officials to strengthen the city's integrated approach. All departments with links to at least one of the four pillars participated in drafting a common vision statement. During these meetings, officials realised they were often working on similar initiatives without knowing it. This exercise brought departments closer together, aligned their goals, and laid the foundation for a comprehensive citywide approach."

– Leen Tyrions, Project Officer, Rikolto Belgium

Re-engaging schools

The framework also offered municipal administrations **a tool to re-engage schools around shared objectives.**

Active schools: Those already working on food or environmental issues could easily connect and align their efforts.

Newcomers: Other schools were able to take their first structured steps toward a school food policy thanks to the WSFA framework.

Case study: coherence in the Dordogne region

The Dordogne region in France illustrates how the WSFA strengthens coherence across the pillars. Initially, the region focused on:

- Pillar B (Food): A sustainable and healthy offering.
- Pillar D (Community): Sourcing ingredients within a 30-kilometer radius to support local producers.

Through the WSFA, they expanded their focus to include Governance (Pillar A) and Education (Pillar C):

"For example, in Pillar A, we systematically addressed the WSFA criteria in school council committees, which include school leaders, teachers, kitchen staff, parents, students, and members of the departmental council. They now approach school food issues within the full complexity of the school system."

– Vincent Demaison, Director of Economic and Territorial Development, Dordogne-Périgord Department, France

It is concrete and versatile

In developing the WSFA criteria, significant attention was given to practical applicability across diverse school contexts. Schools are not required to meet all criteria immediately to begin implementation.

Achieving change takes time. It involves gradually introducing concrete and often small improvements that foster a healthier and more sustainable food culture. At the start, schools can select elements that best fit their unique context.

A roadmap for realistic progress

By structuring the framework around four pillars, the **WSFA encourages both realistic progress and systemic change** across the entire school food system²⁰.

“Because we are a school for special education, the challenges around food are very specific to the needs of our students. We really need tailored approaches to meet the children’s needs.”

– De Sassepoort (Spoor 9), Urban Freinet School for Special Education, Ghent, Belgium

© Layla Aerts



© Layla Aerts

European standard, local relevance

The bronze-level baseline criteria were developed for application across Europe. They are intentionally general so that all European schools can achieve this level²¹. They provide a minimum standard for an integrated school food approach but should be aligned with regional or national objectives to ensure local relevance.

The framework in action: regional flexibility

Practical examples illustrate how the criteria adapt to different national realities:

- **Sweden:** Tap water availability is legally mandated, automatically fulfilling Criterion B.4 (free drinking water). Conversely, Criterion B.5 (lunchbox guidelines) is not relevant there, as all students receive free school meals.
- **Vienna & Nürnberg:** Criteria were adapted to integrate local regulations and existing school practices, ensuring that implementation remains both feasible and effective.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

At a glance: 5 key insights from chapter 1



1. Works effectively and inspires

- Schools see tangible results and feel motivated, the bronze–silver–gold system makes progress visible and encourages ambition.
- **Facts:** Implemented in **12** countries, **18** cities & regions, **600** schools, **150** best practices gathered, **288** Farm-to-School Twinnings.



2. Education goes beyond the plate

- Students develop knowledge and skills for healthy, sustainable food; encourages behaviour change among students and their families.
- **Example:** Copenhagen’s “potato tender” project – hands-on learning through gardening, farm visits, and math exercises.



3. Systemic approach across four pillars

- It creates lasting, structural change in school food. It prevents fragmented, one-off initiatives.
- **Focus on four pillars:** Policy & Leadership – Food & Sustainability – Education & Learning – Community & Partnership.



4. Builds connections

- It strengthens collaboration between schools, municipalities and local producers. It aligns goals and ensures coherent action.
- **Facts:** **33** coaching sessions, over **700** participants.



5. Concrete and versatile in every context

- Applicable to any school type and adaptable to local regulations; step-by-step implementation enables sustainable change.

Cohesion is key: Multilevel support is essential

Alignment with the European Child Guarantee

A resilient school food system serves as a fundamental pillar of equity, ensuring that every child has access to healthy meals regardless of their socio-economic background.

This commitment directly aligns with the **European Child Guarantee**, which establishes a benchmark of providing at least one healthy meal per school day for every child, a vital intervention for those at risk of social exclusion¹.

The Whole School Food Approach (WSFA) framework operationalises this social dimension through a progressive structure:

Bronze level: ensures foundational access to prevent any student from being left behind.

Silver and Gold levels: introduce sophisticated solidarity mechanisms at both the school and community levels.

From ambition to daily reality

Despite the clarity of these social objectives, translating them into a daily reality requires navigating a complex landscape of institutional challenges. **Schools often face several barriers:**

- **Lack of long-term vision:** Many schools lack specific insights into the health needs of their pupils and staff.
- **High workloads:** Insufficient policymaking capacity can make a sustainable food policy feel like an unattainable goal rather than a core mission.
- **Fragmented support:** Schools are often left to navigate a disjointed array of actors and regulations without a clear roadmap.

The need for multilevel support

To overcome these obstacles, **multilevel support is essential**. This approach builds internal capacity and integrates health goals seamlessly into the school day, bridging the gap between high-level policy and the classroom.



© Layla Aerts

Staff

Local authorities

Local authorities play a central role in guiding schools, translating overarching goals into concrete actions. In practice, this coordination is often managed by existing civil servants or newly created city coordinator positions.

These coordinators act as essential intermediaries, working with schools to develop step-by-step action plans and implementing concrete WSFA activities.

Effective support at this level combines guidance, coaching, and knowledge sharing. Within the School Food 4 Change project, this included:

- One-on-one support.
- Peer-to-peer exchanges between different schools.
- Training sessions for management, teachers, and parents/ caregivers.

Navigating external pressures

However, this process is often challenged by external pressures such as staff shortages and other needs.

“In Nuremberg, schools are developing action plans, but everything takes time. The process is further challenged by Long Covid, Ukrainian refugees, and staff shortages.”

— Dorothee Everding, former project coordinator, city of Nuremberg

To mitigate these pressures, local authorities must foster a long-term vision where schools are seen as implementing partners of broader local food strategies. This supra-school coordination ensures that schools do not work in isolation, stimulating innovation and consolidating fragmented resources across departments like education, health, and agriculture.

Solutions for smaller municipalities

For smaller municipalities where capacity is limited, partnerships with larger central cities or regional authorities can provide the necessary oversight while reducing individual workloads.

While the SF4C project focused on larger cities, scale-up initiatives in smaller municipalities revealed that limited capacity can hinder such a directing role.

To reduce workload and costs while maintaining structured support, smaller municipalities can:

- **Form partnerships:** Collaborate with larger central cities or regional authorities for oversight.
- **Seek regional coordination:** Leverage national or regional financing to pool resources.
- **Consolidate resources:** Share technical expertise across neighbouring districts to maintain a sustainable school food policy.

Supra-urban, regional or national coordination

While cities provide a strong starting point due to their flexibility and context-specific approach (see in more detail in chapter one: it is concrete and versatile), national-level commitment is often lacking. Local and school-level initiatives frequently encounter the limitations of their authority. Decisions related to food education (Pillar C) and the broader school environment and participation (Pillar D) often fall outside their control.

The authority gap

National authorities, such as ministries of education, agriculture and health, are essential to structurally embed the framework, provide legal mandate to schools and enable scalability.

“This year we began recruiting candidate schools, but this also means we need to engage people (principals and teachers) over whom we have no control since they are employees of the Ministry of Education. Slowly but surely, we are gaining their trust and raising awareness of what School Food 4 Change offers them as schools. Progress is being made, but not as quickly as we would like.”

– Vincent Demaison, Director of Economic and Territorial Development, Dordogne-Périgord Department, France

The critical role of the National Lead Partners (NLP)

Within SF4C, each participating country was assigned a local expert called National Lead Partner (NLP). Initially, their role was not fully defined, but it soon became clear that NLPs have a critical role in bridging the local, regional/national and international policy level.

NLPs make the WSFA scalable and sustainable by:

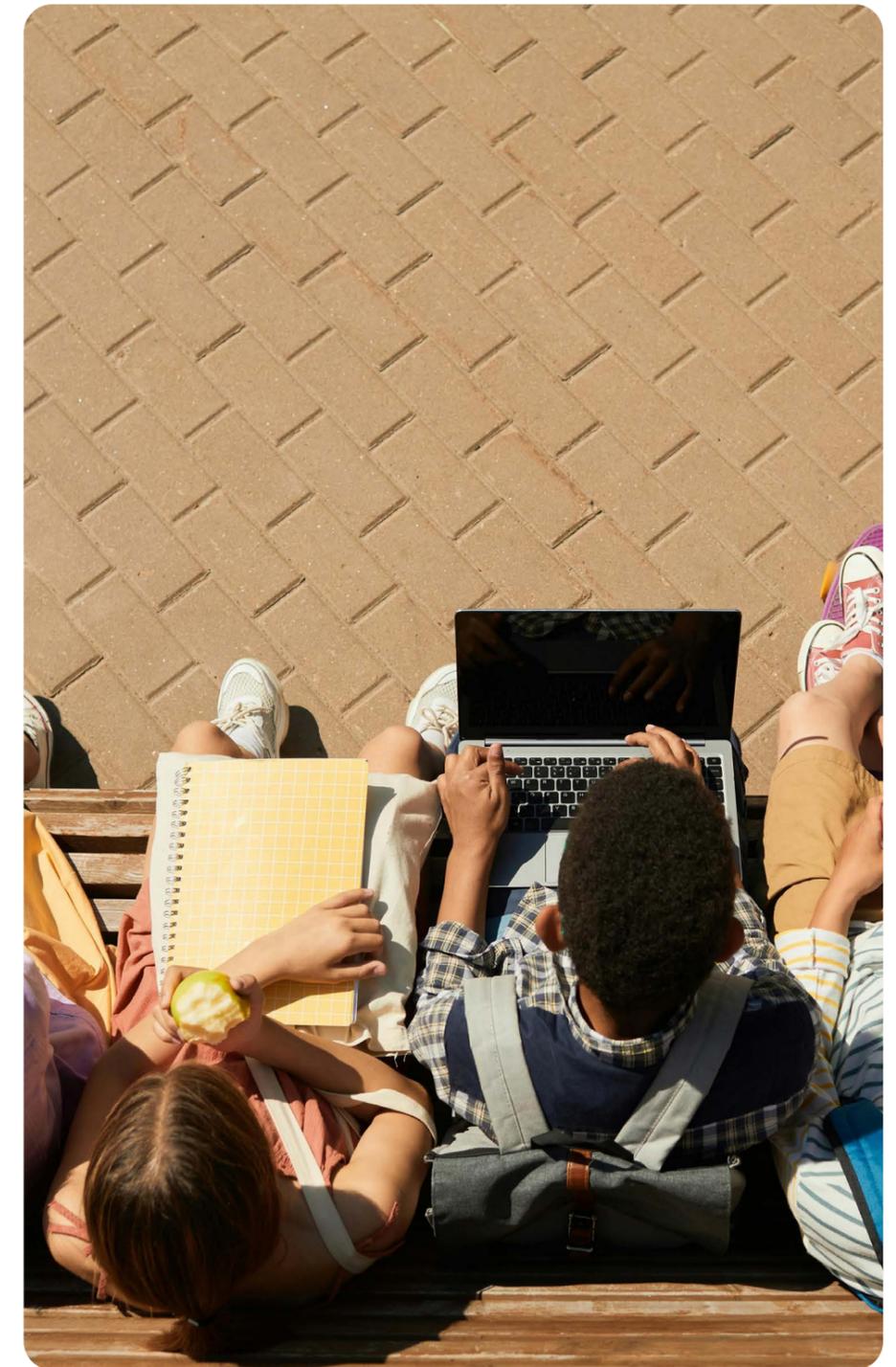
- **Adapting the framework** to align with national and regional regulations.
- **Developing engagement strategies** that resonate with local city officials and schools.
- **Influencing legislation** to better support child nutrition, from curricula integration to minimum food standards.

A vision for policy coherence

To move beyond pilot projects, countries need a transversal, multilevel approach that coordinates across education, health, poverty reduction, and agriculture.

“To create a healthy, supportive, and sustainable school food system, we need a shared national food policy vision that aligns education, environmental, and health objectives. Achieving this requires improving coherence between current regulations on school meal provision and other sectoral legislation and policy documents.”
– Evelin Piirsalu, SEI Tallinn, NLP for Estonia

By aligning efforts vertically and horizontally, national and regional authorities provide the stable framework that allows cities and schools to implement food policies that are both ambitious and context-sensitive.



© Pexels

Financial support

Strategic investment in coordination: a key driver for impact

Each city participating in SF4C received an operational budget dedicated to carrying out WSFA-related activities. This included:

- €3,000 for school-level workshops.
- €3,000 to organize large networking events.
- €5,000 for farm-to-school twinnings.

These funds were allocated efficiently, proving that even modest amounts can significantly increase a project's appeal. **By providing concrete means** that could be integrated directly into existing routines, schools and **teachers felt more motivated to start with the implementation of the WSFA framework.**

Additional funding supported collaboration with NLPs and cross-country networking among Member States, providing structured guidance, practical tools, and low-barrier opportunities for schools to implement the WSFA effectively. The long-term goal is for the WSFA to become a natural part of school operations and the city's broader food vision.

Targeted support is particularly important during the initial phases when structures, partnerships, and routines are still being established.



© An Van Gijsegem

Start-up versus long-term operations

While implementing the WSFA criteria in schools requires relatively limited financial resources, start-up investments such as kitchen equipment, crockery and cutlery can be significant. **Beyond the kitchen, the long-term goal is for the WSFA to become a natural part of school operations and the city's broader food vision.** Targeted support is particularly important during the initial phases when structures, partnerships, and routines are still being established.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 2

The human investment: time and staffing

The most critical investments are not just in equipment, but in time and people:

- **Coordination:** managing school food activities and intersectoral partnerships.
- **Engagement:** mobilising volunteers, including parents/caregivers.
- **Personnel costs:** for local authorities, this typically requires dedicated staff or a strategic reallocation of existing personnel hours.

Who does what?

City staff

- **Operational link:** City coordinators act as the primary reference point, bridging the gap between municipal departments (health, education, environment) and the schools themselves.
- **Local stakeholder engagement:** Bringing together school management, parents/caregivers, local farmers and suppliers to foster a shared food vision within the community.
- **Direct school support:** Providing hands-on coaching, monitoring progress (bronze-silver-gold), and supporting activities such as the farm-to-school twinning initiatives.

National Lead Partners/local experts

- **Strategic alignment:** National Lead Partners (NLPs) ensure that local successes are not isolated but instead inform national food standards and sectoral legislation.
- **Curriculum & policy integration:** Advocating for nutrition and sustainability to be embedded directly into national curricula, moving beyond optional school-level projects.
- **Systemic scaling:** Adapting the European WSFA framework to fit national regulations, ensuring the model is legally and structurally sustainable for all municipalities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 2

At a glance: 6 key insights from chapter 2

To turn a good idea into a lasting school culture, support is the invisible engine. These are the core insights on how to effectively empower schools:



1. End the fragmentation

Schools are drowning in isolated initiatives. Success requires a single, coordinated approach that bundles resources from health, education, and agriculture into one clear roadmap.



2. The city coordinator is essential

Without a central point of contact at the municipality, plans stall. This role is essential for translating abstract policy into bite-sized, actionable plans for school leadership.



3. Invest in people, not just pots

Funding for workshops and kitchens is vital, but the greatest impact comes from investing in time. This means time for teachers and school staff to learn, and time for coordinators to build local partnerships.



4. Make a bridge to regional/(inter)national policy

National experts (NLPs) are the link to (inter)national ministries. They ensure that local successes aren't confined to one city but are anchored in (inter)national legislation and school curricula.



5. Lighten the teacher's load

Support is only effective if it reduces workload. Ready-to-use lesson materials and clear checklists ensure that healthy food becomes a seamless routine, not an "extra" burden.



6. The European child guarantee as a compass

Multilevel support is the only way to deliver on the European Child Guarantee. By aligning local action with European policy, we ensure a healthy meal for every child, regardless of their socio-economic background.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 3

What can support lasting impact: policy recommendations for scaling school food systems

Creating a sustainable school food system requires a multi-level approach. To achieve long-term impact, schools, local authorities, national governments, and European institutions must each take responsibility. The key lies in coordination across these levels: clear roles, shared objectives, and structured collaboration. Only when these links reinforce each other can the WSFA framework become a lasting part of school policy and broader food strategies.

The path to scalability

In the following sections, we present targeted policy recommendations for each level (local, regional, national, and European) to support sustainable implementation, integration, and scaling of the WSFA framework.

Governance level	Primary focus
Local	Coordination, hands-on coaching and community engagement.
Regional	Legislative mandates, resource pooling, logistics and technical support for smaller municipalities and structural funding.
National	Legislative mandates, curriculum integration and structural funding.
European	Strategic frameworks such as the Child Guarantee, and cross-border knowledge sharing.

Role of schools: the first anchor point

Schools are the starting point for sustainable change. The WSFA can only have lasting impact if schools integrate food as a structural part of their vision and daily operations. Establishing a food working group, led by a dedicated coordinator with time and mandate, is essential²³.

“It meant a lot that the school administration fully supported this topic. They created many opportunities, allowing us to change the school canteen offerings and address food themes in various lessons.”

– BGSZC Budai Gimnázium és Szakgimnázium, Budapest, Hungary

Without such structures, continuity remains dependent on external guidance. **Schools that formally embed a WSFA show greater coherence, ownership, and autonomy in further implementation.**

Role of local governments: levers for structural integration

Local authorities act as the bridge between high-level policy and the classroom. Cities with a clear **food strategy** provide more than just a framework, they offer access to resources, expertise and cross-departmental coordination.

Proven success: examples from Copenhagen, Milan, Viimsi and Vienna demonstrate that political backing and cross-departmental collaboration lead to smoother implementation and more sustainable outcomes. Without structural policy support, initiatives remain fragmented.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure that the WSFA moves from a pilot project to a permanent standard, we recommend the following actions:

Integrate the WSFA into existing local policies and school structures: Embed it within current food strategies, sustainability plans, or social policies, ensuring alignment with existing processes and routines. Provide dedicated support and simple tools to minimise extra workload and reduce perceptions of bureaucracy.

Appoint a food coordinator: Establish a food working group with a lead responsible person who has allocated time, mandate, and potentially a formal role.

Integrate educational criteria into procurement: Caterers become structural partners in delivering food education and sustainable offerings.

Focus on networks and knowledge exchange: Organise regional networking events between schools, national meetings between cities, and European exchanges to share good practices.

Implement social inclusion mechanisms: Link the WSFA practices to existing local or national guidelines to ensure all students have access to healthy and sustainable food.

Strengthen parent/caregiver engagement and school-community communication: Provide schools with practical guidance, toolkits, and structured opportunities to integrate parents and caregivers into nutrition and sustainability activities, making involvement routine, manageable, and embedded in existing school practices.

Role of regional and national authorities: scaling the WSFA

Regional and/or national authorities play a critical role in creating the conditions for sustainable scaling of the WSFA. Implementing an integrated school food approach requires coherence across existing policy frameworks related to school meals, food education, health, agriculture and sustainability.

Structural embedding at these levels provides:

- **Structural funding:** Reliable financial support for both schools and municipalities.
- **Clear standards:** Universal guidelines for healthy and sustainable school meals.
- **Support experts:** Empowering national WSFA experts to offer guidance, expertise, and monitoring.

Without this embedding, progress remains trapped in temporary project cycles and individual initiatives, making it nearly impossible to sustain long-term results.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To bridge the gap between local success and national reality, we recommend that regional and/or national authorities:

Adapt the European WSFA framework to regional/national contexts: Ensure objectives are realistic, measurable and aligned with local circumstances.

Establish legislation and guidelines: Develop national standards for school meals, using the WSFA as a cross-departmental quality framework.

Allocate dedicated funding: Link concrete financial resources to targeted actions, e.g., through existing programmes or subsidies (EU Milk and Fruit Scheme, national food strategies).

Integrate the WSFA into the curriculum: Embed food skills, sustainability, and health as core components of education programs.

Connect educational resources to learning objectives: Provide time and funding for the development, selection, and dissemination of materials that align with curriculum goals and promote sustainable behaviour.

Integrate educational criteria into procurement: Caterers become structural partners in delivering food education and sustainable offerings.

Role of Europe: embedding the WSFA in policy

Many of the challenges addressed by the WSFA are common across Europe. European collaboration, through initiatives such as SchoolFood4Change, adds significant value. It facilitates the exchange of methods and practices, enables testing innovations at scale, and provides access to EU funding, accelerating and strengthening the implementation of the WSFA.

European recognition also enhances legitimacy, encouraging national and local governments to prioritise school food on their policy agendas. Integrating the WSFA into existing EU programmes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

For the WSFA to become a standard across Member States, the European Union should:

Strengthen the EU Child Guarantee by explicitly recognising healthy and sustainable school food environments as a core instrument for social resilience and child nutrition.

Mandate the Whole School Food Approach (WSFA) as the reference framework for integrating food education, food culture, health and community engagement in schools across all EU Member States.

Embed school meals in ongoing EU policy processes, in particular the implementation of the EU Vision for Agriculture & Food, the revision of the EU School Scheme, the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and relevant European Climate Resilience and Risk Management and One Health frameworks.

Integrate a cross-cutting approach to school meals in the European institutions to ensure coherence between health, education, agriculture, research, social, environmental and climate policies.

Provide EU minimum mandatory nutritional and sustainability standards for school menus, building on SF4C evidence, the EU School Scheme and Joint Research Centre Sustainable Public Procurement criteria.

Provide dedicated funding for infrastructure: investments for resilient local supply chains, including school kitchens and catering infrastructure, resilient local supply chains, and innovative procurement models using the European Regional Development Fund.

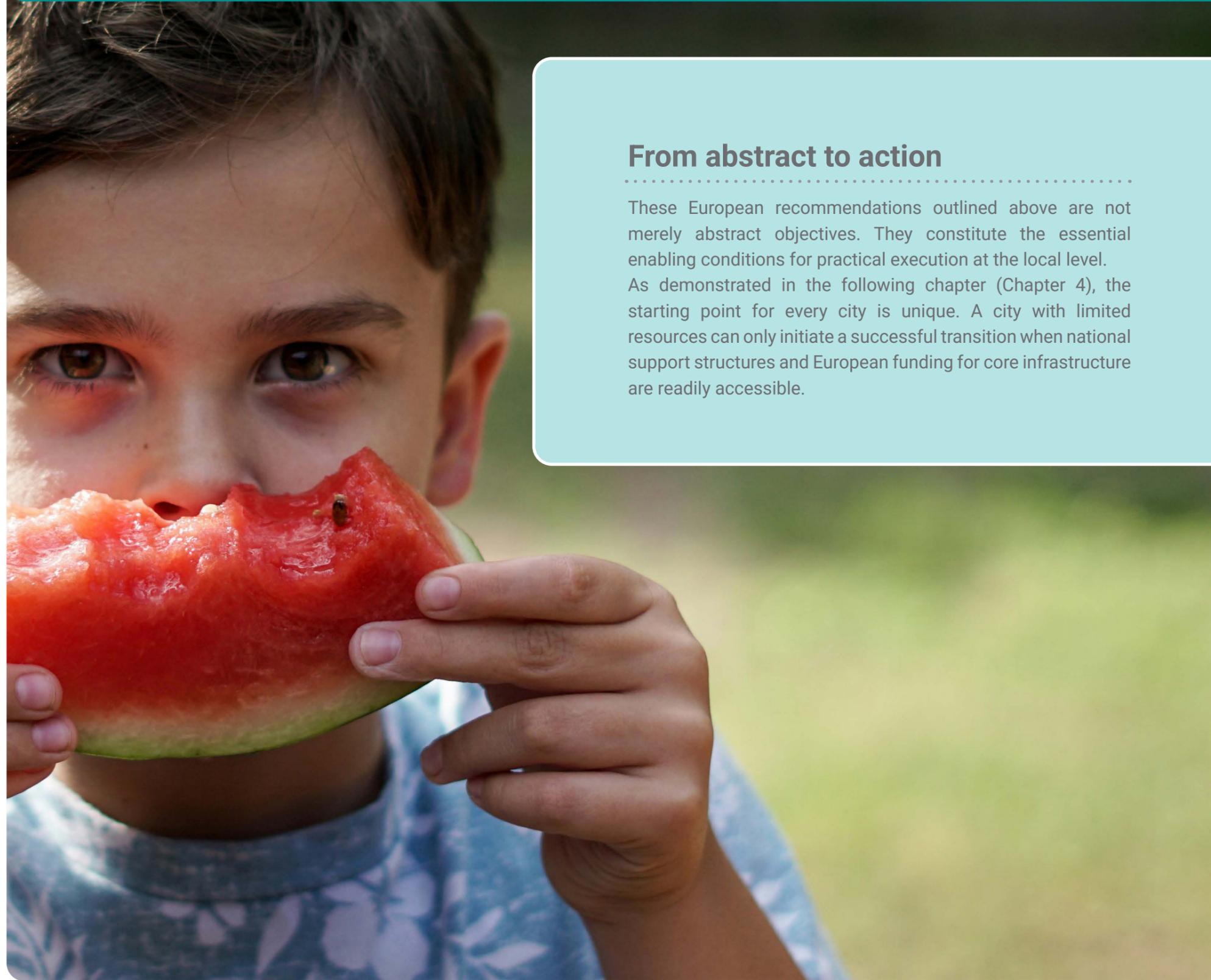
Use ERASMUS+ and leverage the EU Pact for Skills to support training, peer learning and exchange on food education, sustainable cooking and procurement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 3

From abstract to action

These European recommendations outlined above are not merely abstract objectives. They constitute the essential enabling conditions for practical execution at the local level. As demonstrated in the following chapter (Chapter 4), the starting point for every city is unique. A city with limited resources can only initiate a successful transition when national support structures and European funding for core infrastructure are readily accessible.



© Unsplash

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 3

At a glance: 5 key insights from chapter 3

Scaling requires a shift from project-based funding to structural embedding. Policy is the "glue" that ensures the WSFA survives beyond the next election cycle.



1. Schools

Change starts in the classroom and canteen. Success requires a formal mandate: schools must move beyond temporary projects by establishing dedicated food working groups and appointed coordinators with the time to lead.



2. Local governments

By embedding the WSFA into existing local food strategies, local authorities are the bridge between high policy and practice.



3. Regional and/or national authorities

National governments must provide legislation and structural funding to integrate food education into the regional/national curriculum, moving it from an "extra" to a core educational component.



4. The European Union

Europe provides the legitimacy. By explicitly linking the WSFA to the EU Child Guarantee and relevant European Climate Resilience and Risk Management and One Health frameworks, the EU ensures that healthy school meals are recognised as a fundamental right for every child in the European Member States.



5. The golden thread of coordination

Whether it is a city coordinator or a National Lead Partner, neutral intermediaries are essential. They bridge the gap between European strategic goals and local implementation, ensuring that knowledge and funding flow where they are needed most.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

How can new cities get started?

The journey towards a sustainable school food system is not a linear process, but a context-dependent transition. Based on the results of the Kobo survey and the lived experiences of our participating regions (see annex), we have developed a structured pathway for new cities to adopt the Whole School Food Approach (WSFA).

The primary lesson learned is that **success does not come from a one-size-fits-all model**, but from identifying local strengths and scaling gradually.

The implementation roadmap

Before diving into specific actions, a city must engage in general preparation. This phase involves aligning the four pillars of the WSFA. To ensure a long-lasting impact, cities should avoid isolated projects and instead focus on **integrating food goals into permanent municipal structures**. This is best achieved by starting small, perhaps with a single pilot school and leveraging existing networks and partnerships to build momentum.

The most effective way to begin is by analysing the city's current profile to determine where capacity is strongest and where support is most needed. The flowchart below might help you get started.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

WSFA Implementation Flowchart

Start: New city wants to implement WSFA

STEP 1

General Preparation

- Combine policy, operations, education and environment
- Plan for long lasting impact
- Leverage networks & partnerships
- Start small, scale gradually

STEP 2

Analyse city profile

Question:
"What is the city's current strength per pillar?"

Profile 1:

Strong operational capacity, limited education

- Introduce low-threshold educational activities
 - School gardens, cooking workshops, tasting sessions
- Encourage student participation through small projects
 - Menu choices, classroom projects, gardening activities
- Facilitate peer learning for teachers & kitchen staff
- Gradually integrate food topics into lessons or extracurricular activities

Profile 2:

Strong policy support, limited operational capacity

- Start with a pilot group of schools to test operational practices
- Invest in practical infrastructure
 - Kitchens, local suppliers, meal & food waste monitoring
- Use citywide networks or external partners to support schools
- Translate policy into measurable actions at the school level

Profile 3:

Limited operational and educational capacity

- Set clear, achievable goals per pillar
- Establish internal school working groups for ownership and motivation
- Begin with one concrete practical activity
 - Healthy lunchbox workshops, school garden, water initiatives
- Provide structural city support
 - Coaching, school-to-school networks, simple monitoring tools

STEP 3

Monitoring & Scaling

- Evaluate results
- Learn from experience
- Gradually expand to all schools

Conclusion: from pilots to systemic change

Over the past three years, the implementation of the Whole School Food Approach (WSFA) has demonstrated that school food is far more than a logistical service. It is a powerful lever for social, health and environmental transformation. By aligning the diverse efforts in 12 European countries, this project has proven that **while local contexts vary significantly, a unified framework with concrete criteria provides the necessary clarity to move from fragmented initiatives to systemic change.**

The success of the bronze-level implementation across the majority of participating schools confirms that the WSFA is an achievable model, capable of fostering educational equity and ensuring that no learner is left behind.

Human capital

The journey has revealed that the true engine of this transformation is **strategic coordination**. While financial investments in infrastructure and activities are necessary catalysts, the most critical factor for success is the investment in human capital.

Whether through the recruitment of dedicated city coordinators or the internal reallocation of municipal resources, the presence of specialised staff to navigate the complex landscape of policy and practice is what allows the WSFA to transition from a temporary project to a permanent institutional routine.

The challenges encountered, ranging from staff shortages to fragmented regulations, underscore the fact that schools cannot do this work in isolation. They require a robust support ecosystem where local, regional, and national authorities work in vertical alignment to simplify access to resources and remove bureaucratic barriers.

A strategic investment in the future

Looking ahead, the goal is to move beyond the pilot phase and embed the WSFA into the very fabric of urban and national food visions. This requires a shift in perspective: **seeing school food not as a cost to be managed, but as a strategic investment in the future of public health and social cohesion.** By leveraging the expertise of National Lead Partners and fostering cross-country collaboration, we can ensure that the lessons learned during this project inform broader sectoral legislation and national education goals. The European Child Guarantee provides the benchmark, but the WSFA provides the roadmap.

The path forward

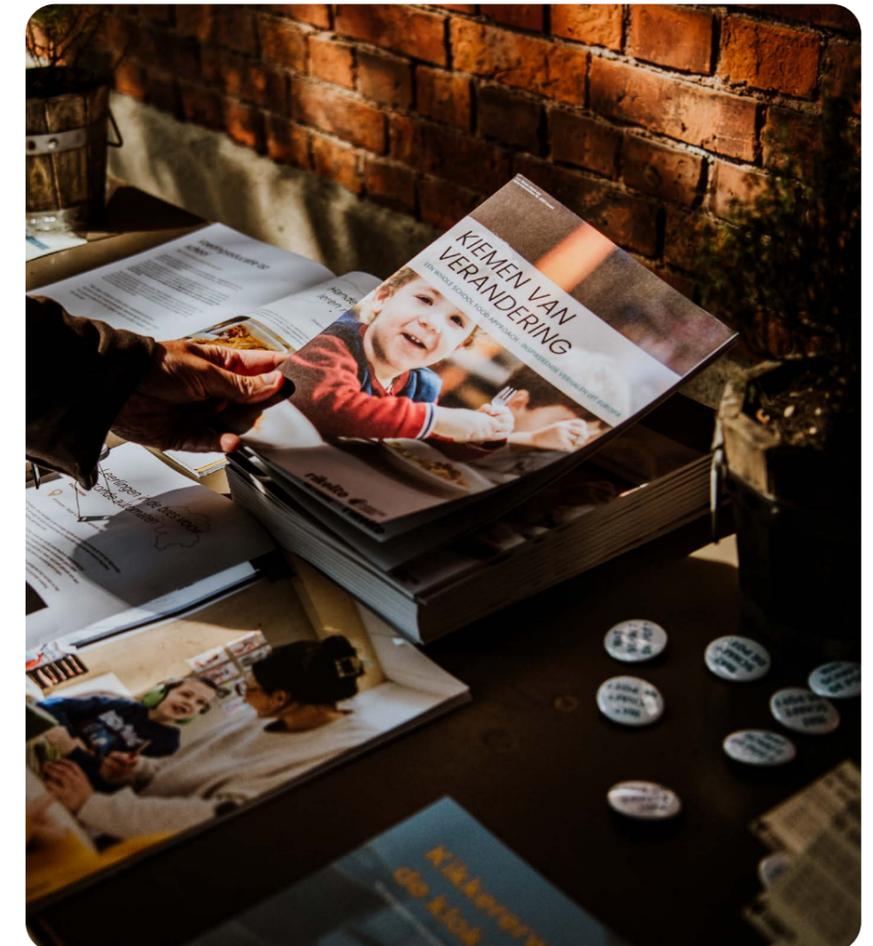
Ultimately, the transition to a resilient school food system depends on the **continued commitment to coordination**, the empowerment of local actors, and a shared vision that every school meal is an opportunity to nourish the next generation and protect the planet. The framework is now established. The task for the coming years is to scale this approach so that healthy and sustainable school food becomes a natural right for every child across Europe.

ANNEX: implementing the Whole School Food Approach: results from Kobo-survey and interviews

This chapter presents an overview of how the Whole School Food Approach (WSFA) has been implemented across participating European cities and regions. It brings together quantitative results from the Kobo survey and qualitative insights from interviews with city coordinators and National Lead Partners to identify common patterns, strengths, and bottlenecks in implementation²⁴.

Building on these findings, the chapter formulates lessons learned and translates them into **practical guidance for new cities interested in adopting or scaling the WSFA**. The structure moves progressively from broad European trends, to detailed regional and country profiles, and finally to actionable recommendations for future implementers.

When interpreting the findings, it is important to acknowledge several limitations. Not all schools completed the survey, and in some regions survey completion was linked to eligibility for WSFA awards, which may have influenced responses. As such, the results should be understood as indicative rather than exhaustive, and always considered in combination with qualitative information to obtain an accurate understanding of local contexts.



© An Van Gijsegem

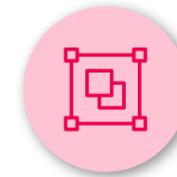
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

Analysis of Kobo-survey results

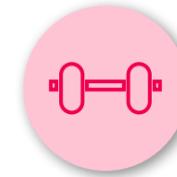
This chapter reflects on the qualitative results gathered through Kobo-survey²⁵. It includes figures and tables showing performance per region and the extent to which individual criteria were met. At the same time, it highlights learning opportunities and inspiring practices that can guide the next phases of the project.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM KOBO-SURVEY:



Achievable framework:

most schools score high on bronze criteria



Strengths:

canteen practices, sustainable food, special dietary needs.



Challenges:

annual action plan review, lunchbox/snack guidance, food waste monitoring.



Regional variation:

highest in Estonia, Austria, Spain, Sweden; structural barriers in Belgium and some cities.

1. Global results for achievement level bronze

KEY INSIGHT

Most schools achieve positive results, showing the framework is achievable.

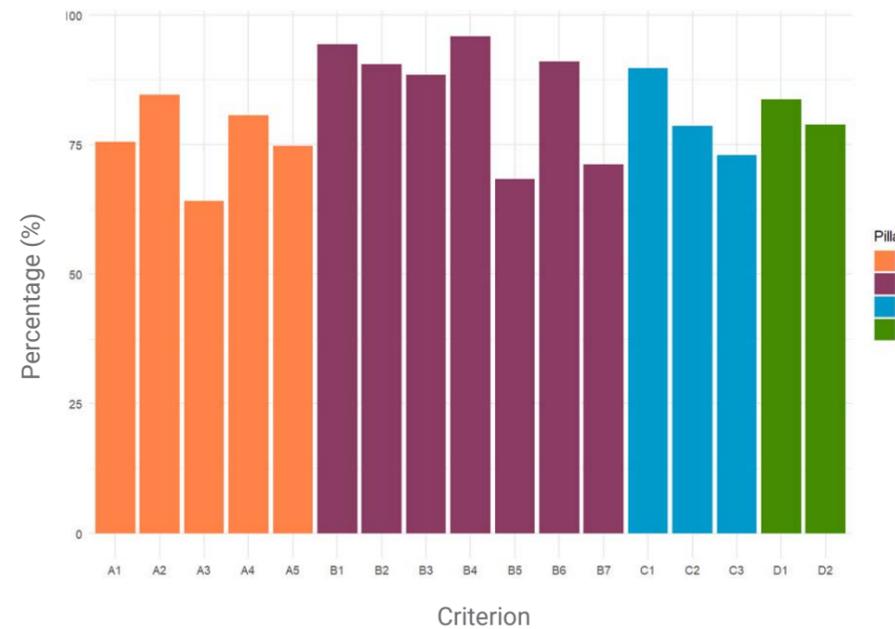


Figure 1: histogram of the percentages achieved per criterion.

Overall, positive results were observed across the board. Most criteria were met by a large majority of schools, and the differences between criteria are relatively modest. This suggests that the WSFA bronze framework constitutes a well-balanced and achievable baseline for schools that engage with the approach.

Only two criteria scored below 70% (B.5 and A.3). A.3 concerns the annual written review of the action plan. As drafting the plan itself often already represents a first hurdle: its follow-up is also perceived as challenging due to workload and uncertainty.

B.5 relates to clear guidelines regarding lunchboxes and/or snacks for students and caregivers. A possible explanation for the lower score is the variation in how schools handle meals. In many cases, students receive a hot school meal, making lunchbox guidelines less relevant and reducing the incentive for schools to take actions influencing parents' or caregivers' choices. Nevertheless, this does not mean that schools are not expected to make efforts to provide guidance on snacks.

These findings suggest that criteria with lower scores may pose barriers for schools participating in WSFA and require additional support. Conversely, criteria with very high scores, such as B.1, B.4, and B.6, can represent achievable entry points when recruiting schools.

2. Analysis of differences across regions

KEY INSIGHT

Even in low-scoring regions, some criteria are achieved, highlighting specific challenges rather than complete implementation gaps.

Systemic challenges: cities or regions scoring low on one criterion often score low on others (e.g., Budapest, Ghent, Copenhagen, Leuven, Lyon, Milan).

Table 1 shows the distribution of the number of schools per region that completed the survey, as well as the average number of criteria achieved. This provides insight into the relative contribution of each region to the overall results and the extent to which schools met the full set of criteria.

The lowest average scores are found in Belgium. Many Flemish schools joined later in the project cycle, with support structures still being built.

The highest averages were achieved by cities in Estonia, Austria, Spain, and Sweden. These regions may have had stronger starting conditions, such as clear national curriculum links (notably Estonia and Sweden), well-established school meal systems, or municipal food policies that aligned closely with WSFA.

City/Country/Region	Number of schools in the survey	Average number of criteria met (total 17)	Average percentage of criteria met
Budapest (Hu)	7	12.1	71.4
Copenhagen (De)	18	11.2	66
Czech Republic	8	14.7	86.4
Estonia (other)	2	16.2	95.6
Ghent (Be)	10	9.8	57.4
Leuven (Be)	6	10.2	60.3
Lyon (Fr)	8	14	82.4
Malmö (Sw)	5	15.8	92.9
Milan (It)	2	12.2	71.9
Nuoro (It)	21	12.6	74.1
Nuremberg (Ge)	10	14.1	82.6
Slovakia	10	15.1	88.5
Spain (other)	3	16.7	98
Tallinn (Es)	6	16.2	95.6
Umeå (Sw)	21	16.6	97.9
Valencia Regional Gov.	19	16.2	95.2
Vienna (Au)	14	15.6	91.6

Table 1: overview of the number of schools per region and average results

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

However, caution is needed when drawing conclusions or making comparisons, as participation may have been highly selective. Schools that had met fewer criteria may also have been less motivated to complete the survey.

Therefore, this report primarily focuses on regional differences in the profile of achieved criteria, as shown in Figure 2. While the overall results are generally positive, there are some outliers among individual regions. The unique approach of each city or region provides valuable lessons: where are the pitfalls, and what works particularly well?

Figure 2 provides an overview of each region's profile across the 17 bronze criteria. While most regions show broadly positive patterns, some outliers stand out. Budapest, Ghent, Copenhagen, Leuven, Lyon, and Milan feature more frequently in the lower-scoring segment of particular criteria. Their specific contexts, governance structures, and starting points influence these profiles and offer important learning opportunities. How the different profiles were developed and what this means for implementation in each region is discussed in more detail below.

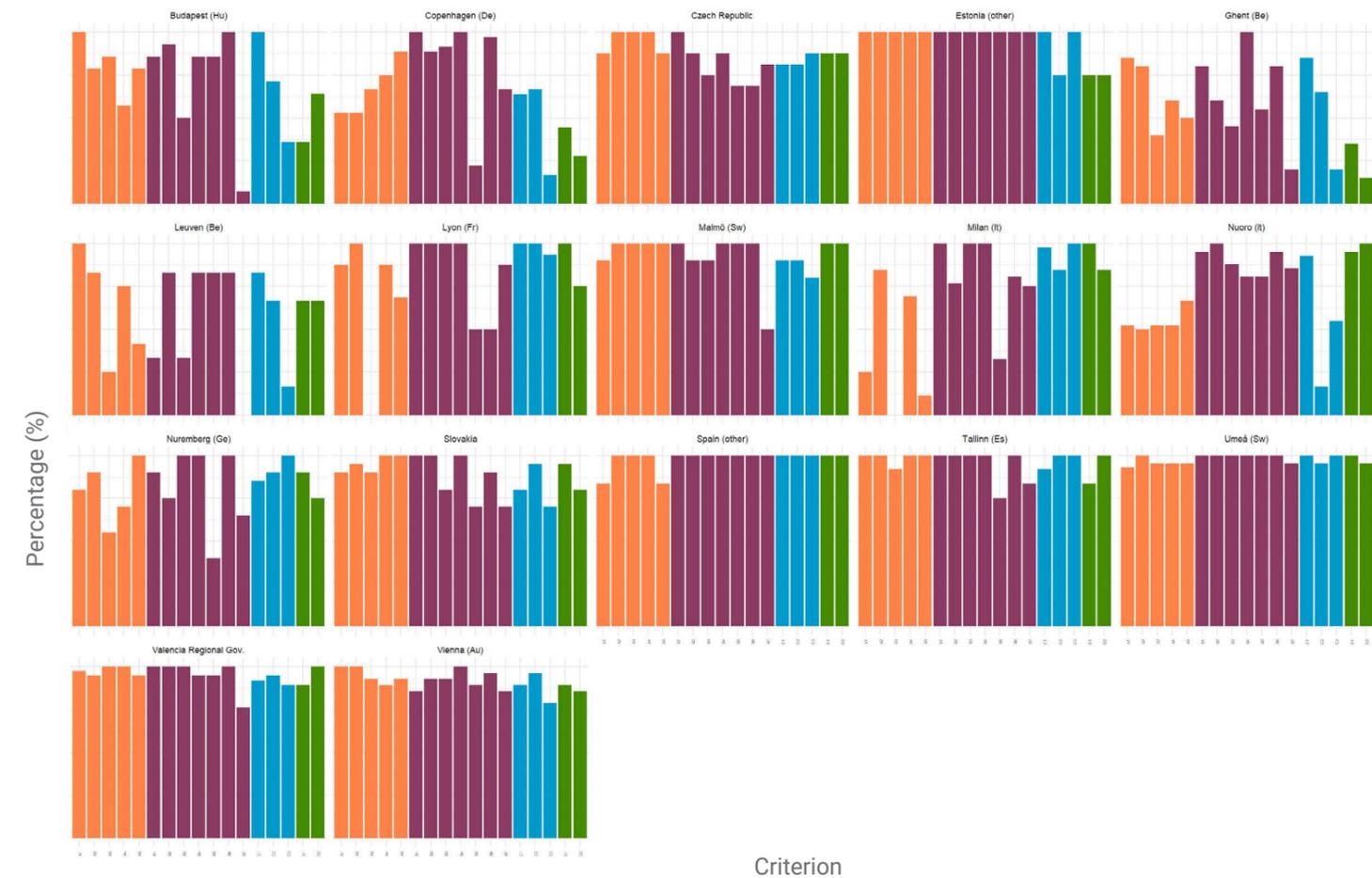


Figure 1: overview of criteria achieved per region

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

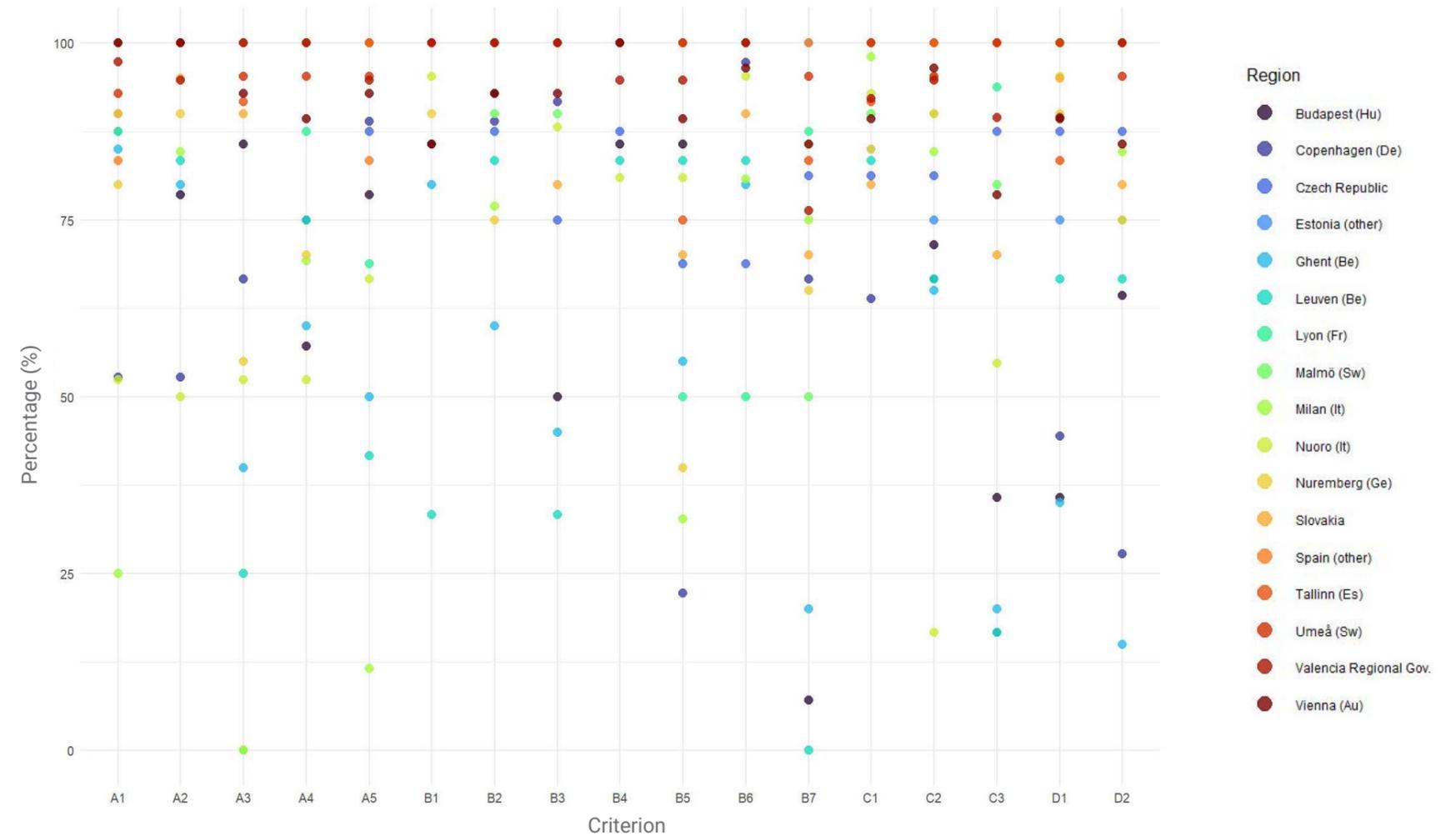


Figure 2: overview of each region's profile across the 17 bronze criteria.

While most regions show broadly positive patterns, some outliers stand out. Budapest, Ghent, Copenhagen, Leuven, Lyon, and Milan feature more frequently in the lower-scoring segment of particular criteria. Their specific contexts, governance structures, and starting points influence these profiles and offer important learning opportunities. How the different profiles were developed and what this means for implementation in each region is discussed in more detail below.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

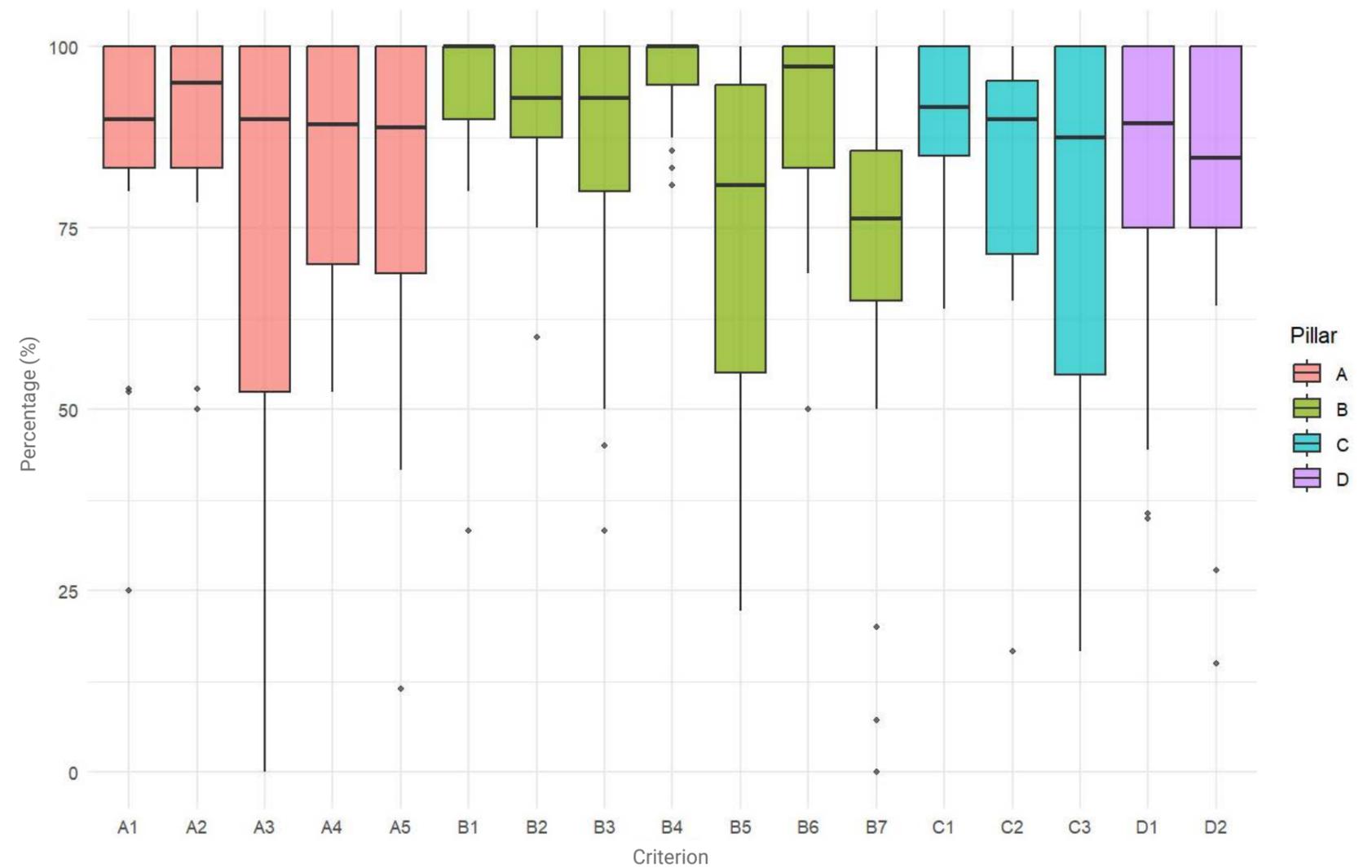


Figure 3: boxplot for percentages of schools per region

Figure 3 compares the percentage of schools meeting each criterion across regions. It shows that for nearly every criterion, at least one region performs below 50%. Importantly, regions that score low on one criterion often achieve lower scores across multiple criteria, pointing to systemic implementation challenges rather than isolated weaknesses.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

Figure 4 shows the variation per criterion across regions. We can see that A.3, B.5 and C.3 exhibit a wide spread, while B.1 and B.4 are the most stable across regions.

For A.3 the annual review of the action plan, the largest differences are observed. Milan scores 0%, whereas Valencia, Umeå, Malmö, and Vienna achieve over 90%. B.5 relates to clear guidelines on lunchboxes and/or snacks for students and caregivers (where applicable). As seen in Figures 2 and 3, the average in Copenhagen, Milan, and Nuremberg is below 50%.

C.3 indicates the extent to which workshops and educational resources are available for teachers and school staff. These results largely depend on the regional or national approach to education and the integration of climate or health topics into school curricula. In Belgium this represents a major challenge, whereas in countries like Estonia and Sweden, implementation proceeds more smoothly.

The results in table 3 should be interpreted with great caution. It is likely that schools meeting few criteria did not complete the survey. However, the fact that certain criteria score very low while others are met, highlights the specific challenges associated with those criteria in particular regions.

City/Region/Country	Number of schools in survey	Criteria achieved by less than 50% of the schools
Budapest (Hu)	7	B7 (7.1%), C3 (35.7%), D1 (35.7%)
Copenhagen (De)	18	B5 (22.2%), C3 (16.7%), D1 (44.4%), D2 (27.8%)
Ghent (Be)	10	A3 (40%), B3 (45%), B7 (20%), C3 (20%), D1 (35%), D2 (15%)
Leuven (Be)	6	A3 (25%), A5 (41.7%), B1 (33.3%), B3 (33.3%), B7 (0%), C3 (16.7%)
Lyon (Fr)	8	A3 (0%)
Milan (It)	26	A1 (25%), A3 (0%), A5 (11.5%), B5 (32.7%)
Nuoro (It)	21	C2 (16.7%)
Nuremberg (Ge)	10	B5 (40%)

Figure 4: variation per criterion across regions.

3. Analysis of individual criteria

KEY INSIGHTS

Lowest scores: A.3 (annual action plan review) and B.5 (lunchbox/snack guidelines), indicating areas needing support.

Highest scores: B.1, B.4, B.6, representing easy entry points for new schools.

The results for individual criteria provide insight into the extent to which European schools work on specific pillars and how each criterion contributes to a healthy and resilient food system. Criteria with lower scores highlight learning opportunities, allowing support to be more targeted. Examples of good practices can serve as inspiration for schools or cities struggling to achieve certain objectives.

Highest scoring criteria:

- B.4 (95.9%)
- B.1 (94.3%)
- B.6 (91%)

Lowest scoring criteria:

- B.7 (71.1%)
- B.5 (68.3%)
- A.3 (64.2%)

These criteria clearly indicate a need for additional support to overcome barriers.

Criterion	Number of schools reaching a criterion (%)
A1	75.5
A2	84.5
A3	64.2
A4	80.7
A5	74.7
B1	94.3
B2	90.5
B3	88.4
B4	95.9
B5	68.3
B6	91
B7	71.1
C1	89.7
C2	78.6
C3	72.9
D1	83.8
D2	78.9

Table 2: percentage of schools meeting each criterion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

Overview of percentages per region per criterion

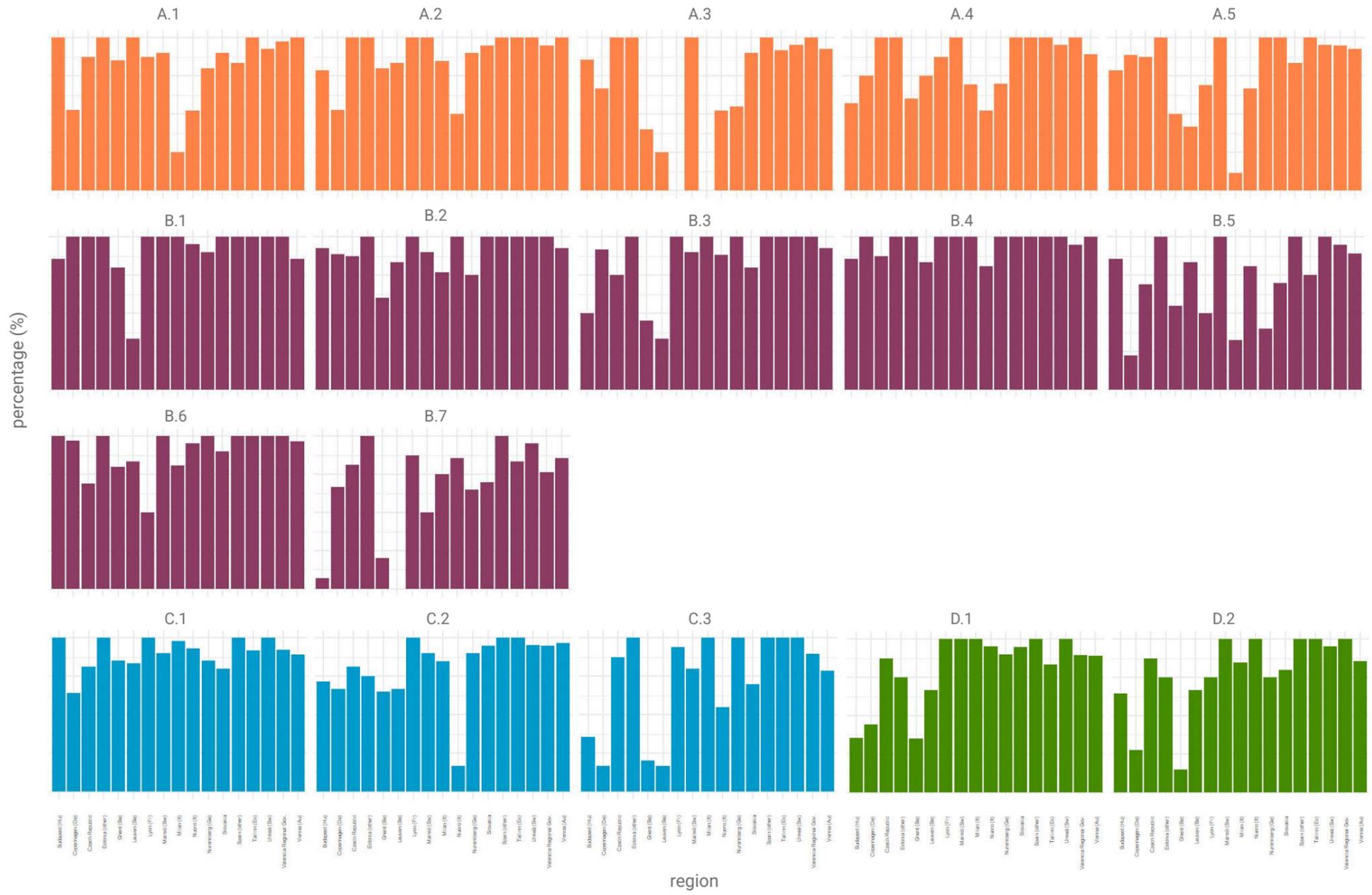
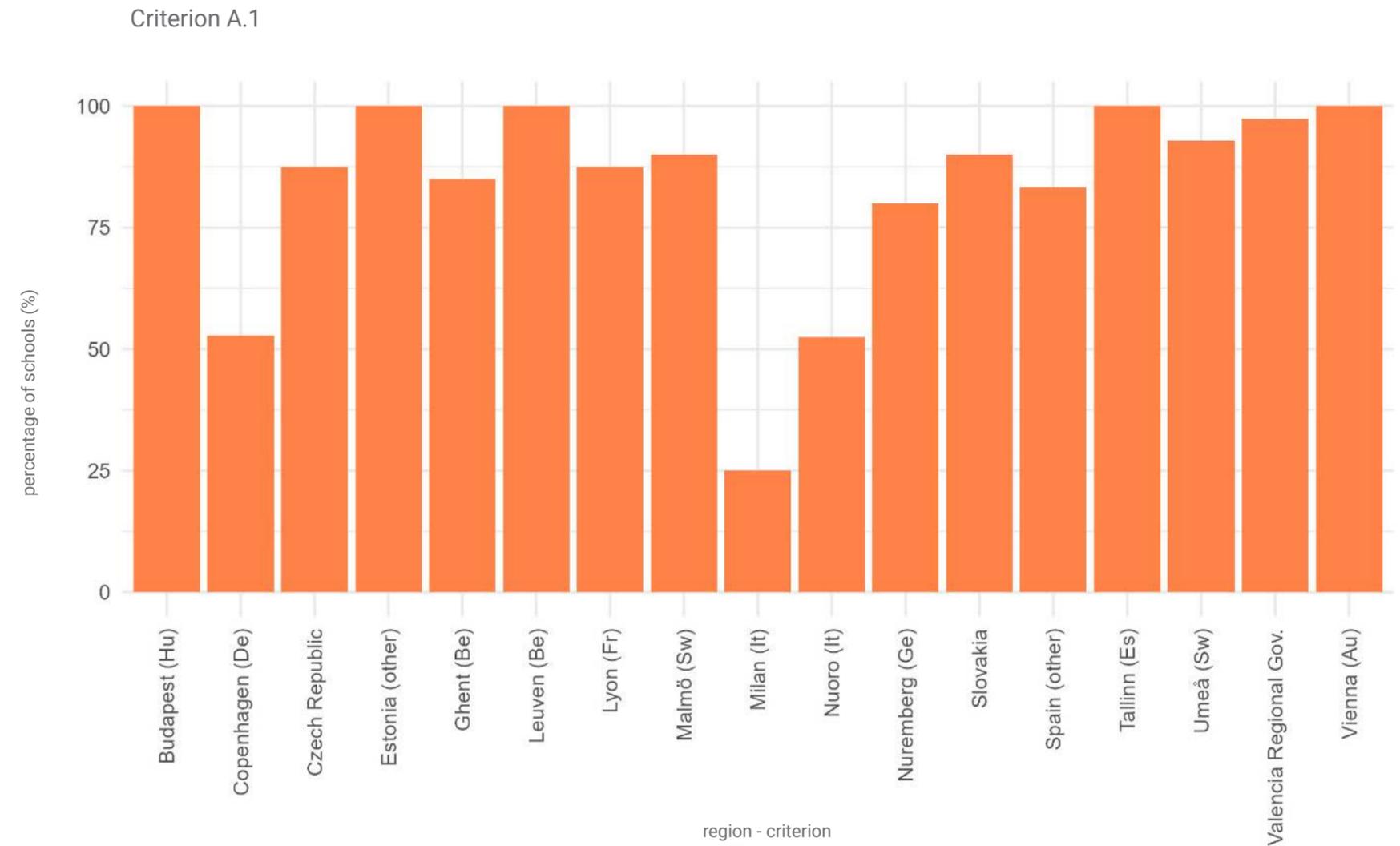


TABLE OF CONTENTS

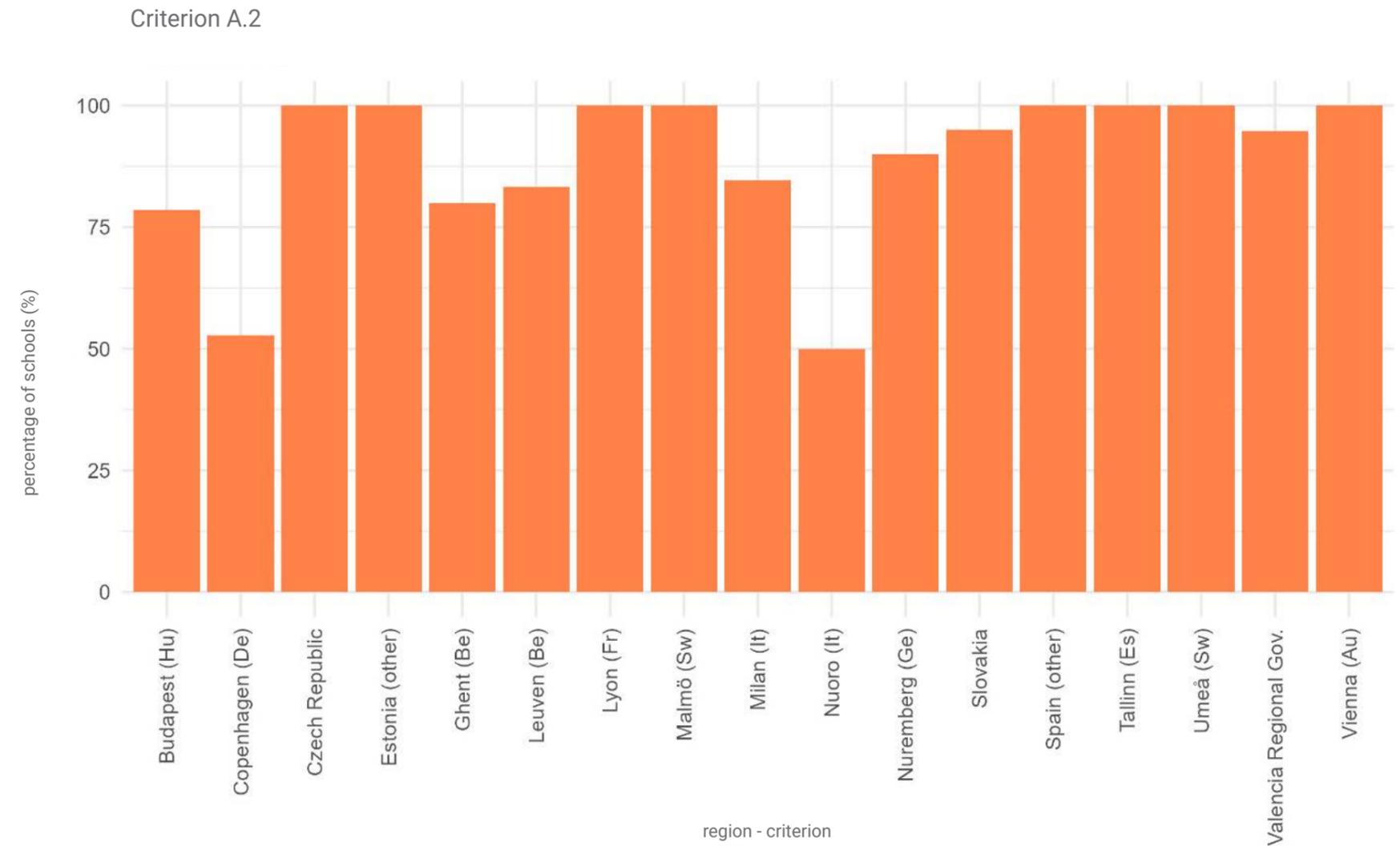
Chapter 4



For criterion A.1, Copenhagen, Milan, and Nuoro score significantly lower than the other regions. In Nuoro, all schools except one do not have an internal school-based working group. Instead, in Nuoro, schools participated in an inter-school working group, a municipal school canteen committee, and a municipal pedagogical coordination group that includes food-related issues. The risk with this top-down approach is that if funding or support from the city were to cease, the inter-school collaboration would also collapse, along with the coordination of WSFA implementation at the school level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

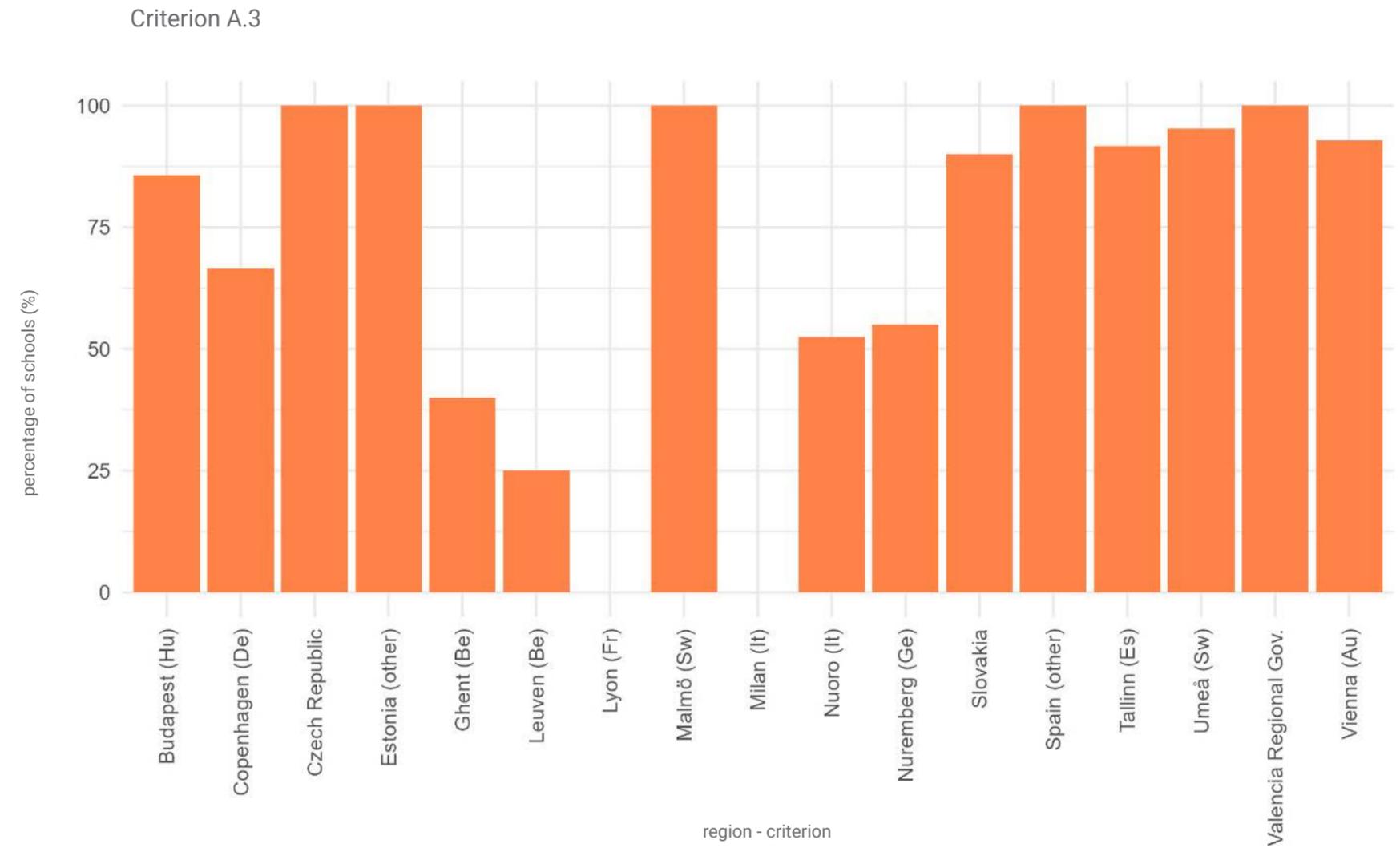
Chapter 4



Most schools in Copenhagen selected “other” for this criterion because they have not formulated a separate school food vision, but instead have integrated the city’s food strategy. In Nuoro, achieving this criterion also appears to be weakly encouraged due to the inter-school working group described under A.1. Schools selected “other” and referred to food safety guidelines which is not the same as having a vision for a comprehensive approach to food.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4



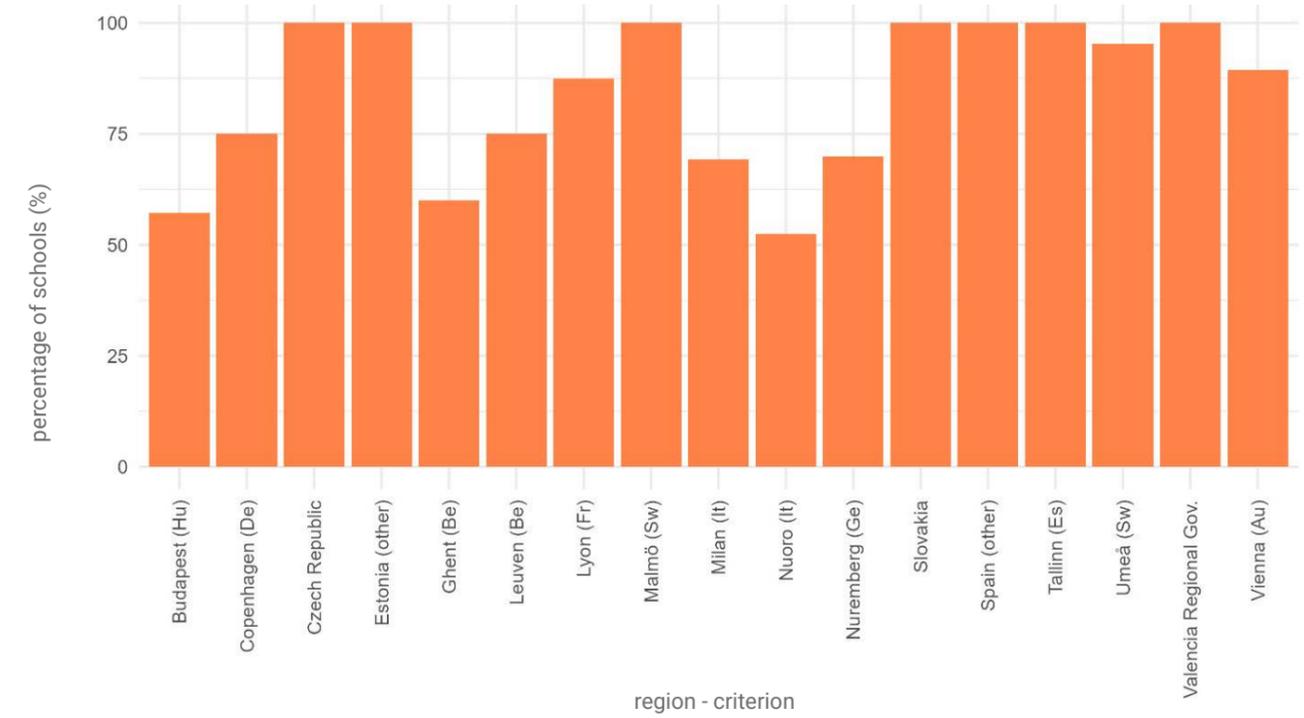
We observe relatively large differences for this criterion, as previously mentioned. Flemish cities, Ghent and Leuven, indicated that they have not yet had sufficient time to address this step. In Nuoro, reference is made to the inter-school working group, which reviews and updates the food policy annually, but this does not result in a written action plan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

Some schools, for example in Milan, indicate that this criterion on actively involving students in the school's integrated food approach is unfeasible for children aged 0–3 years.

Criterion A.4



Criterion A.5

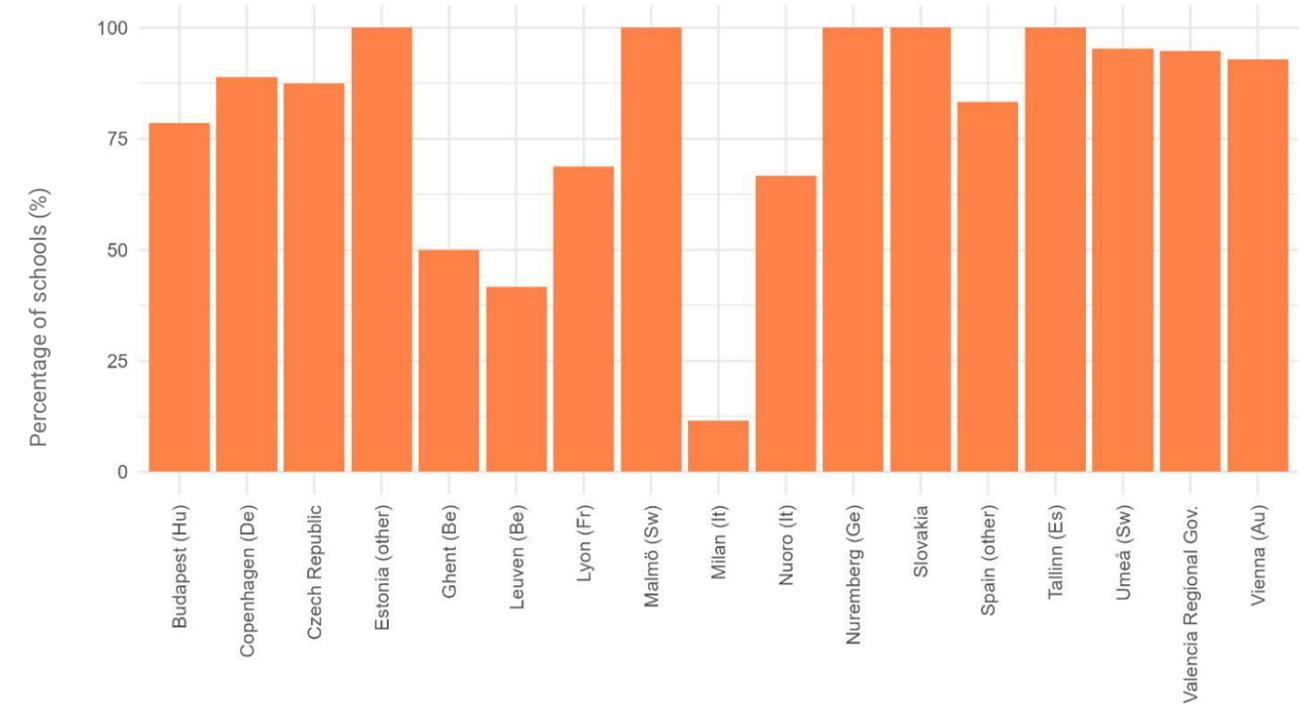
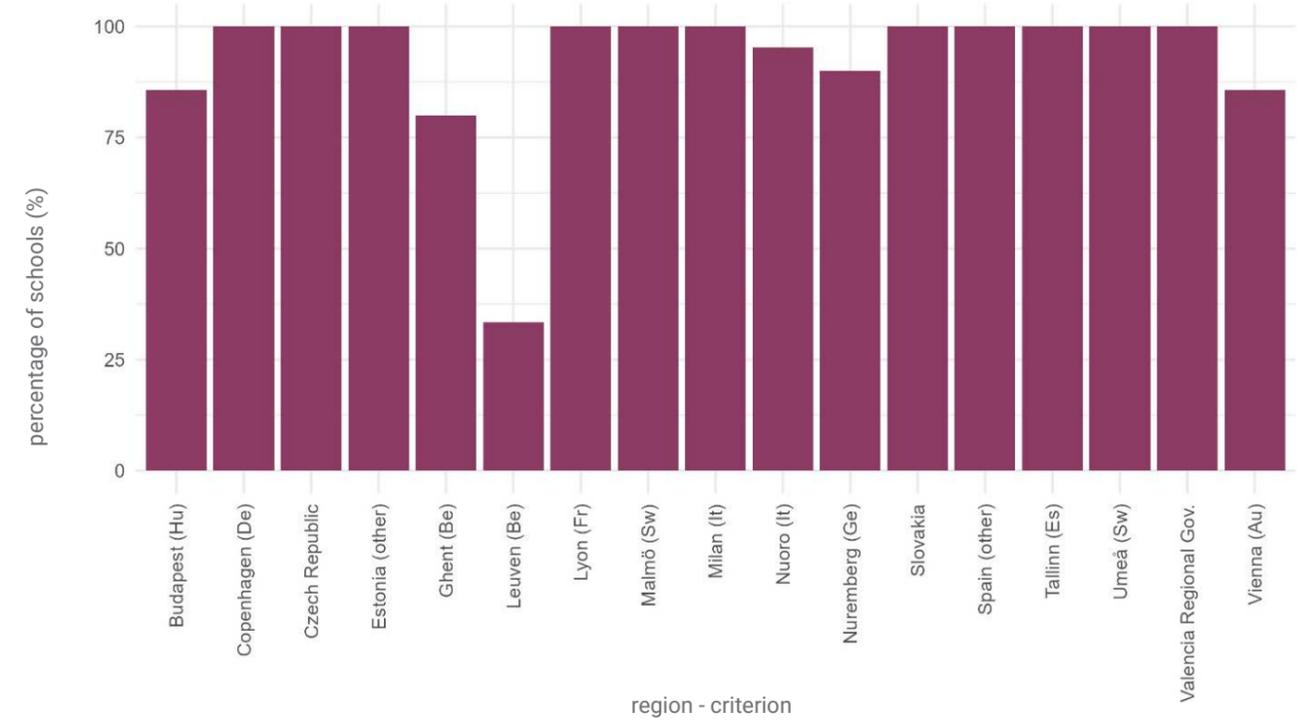


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

Criterion B.2, which concerns encouraging the consumption of fruit and vegetables, is largely achieved in the participating schools.

Criterion B.1



Criterion B.2

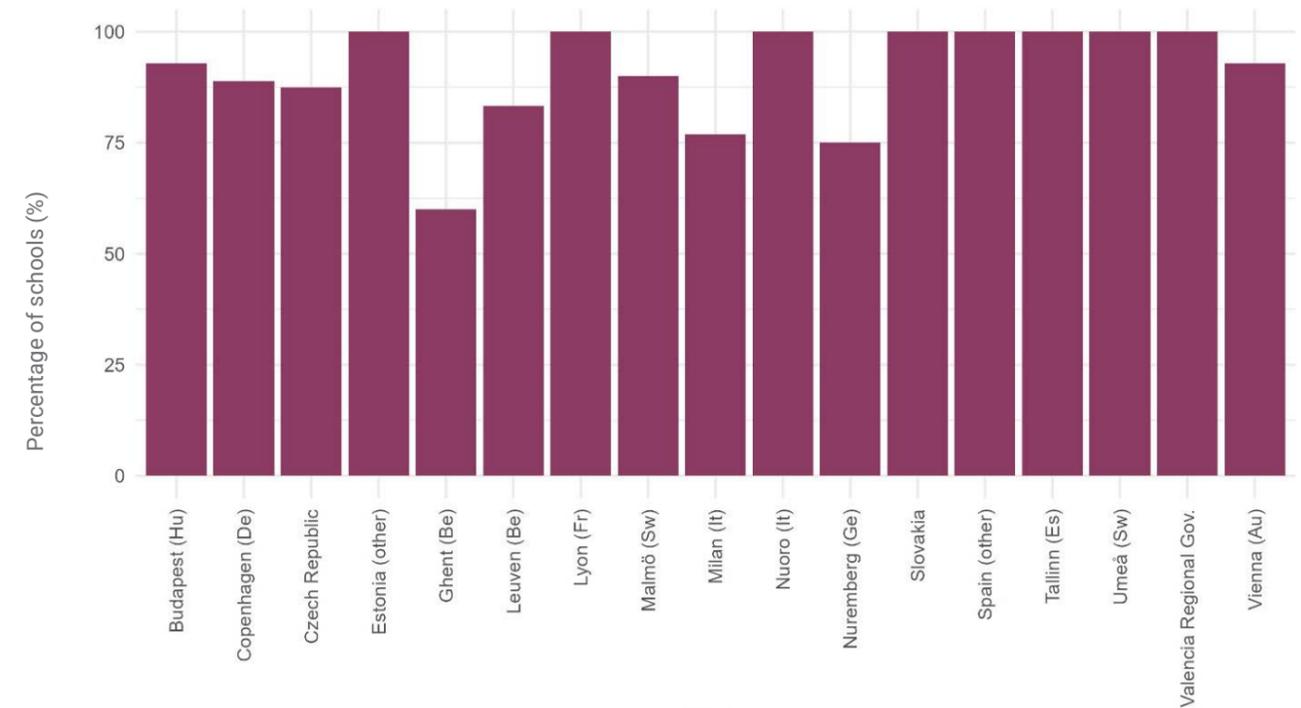
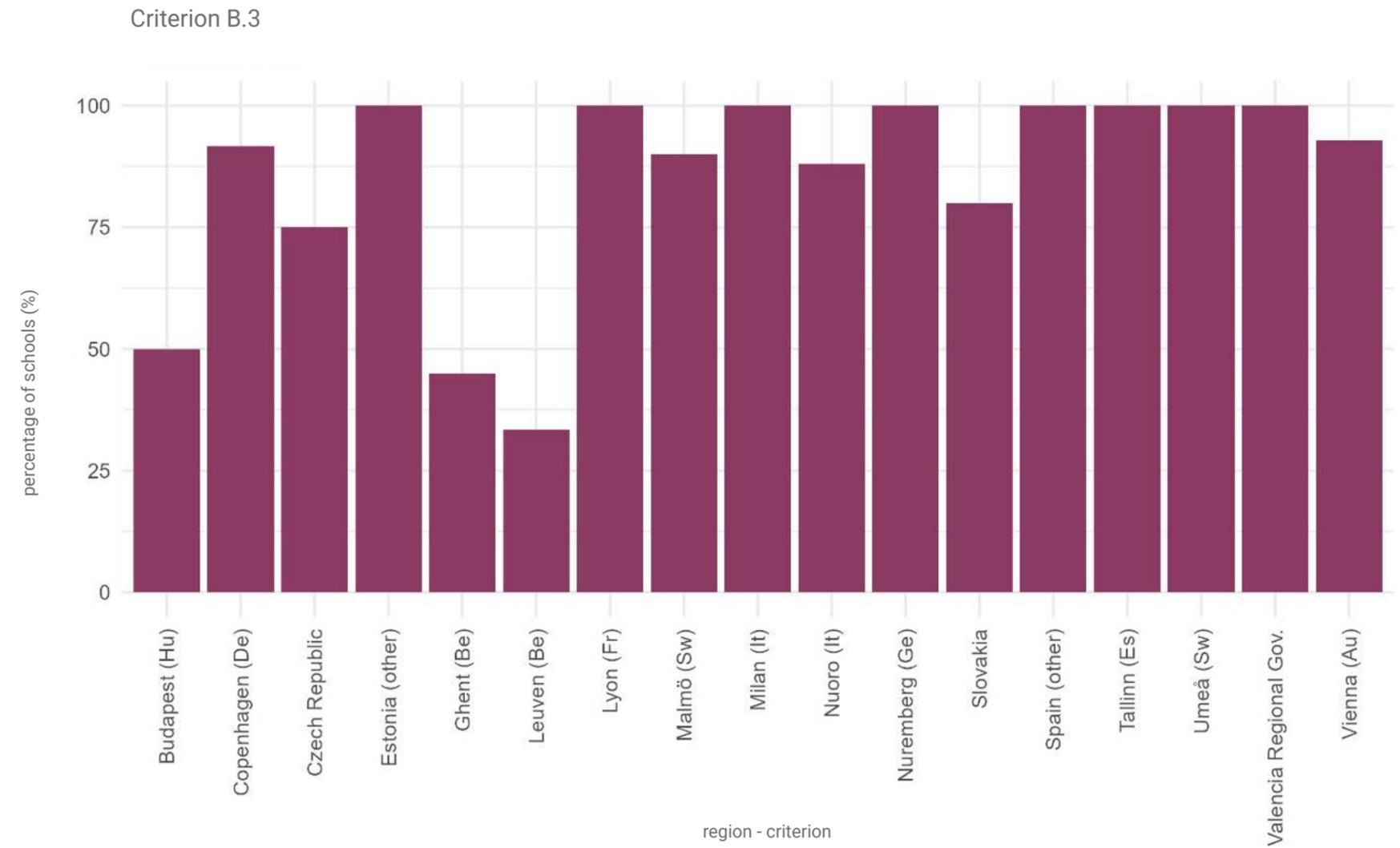


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4



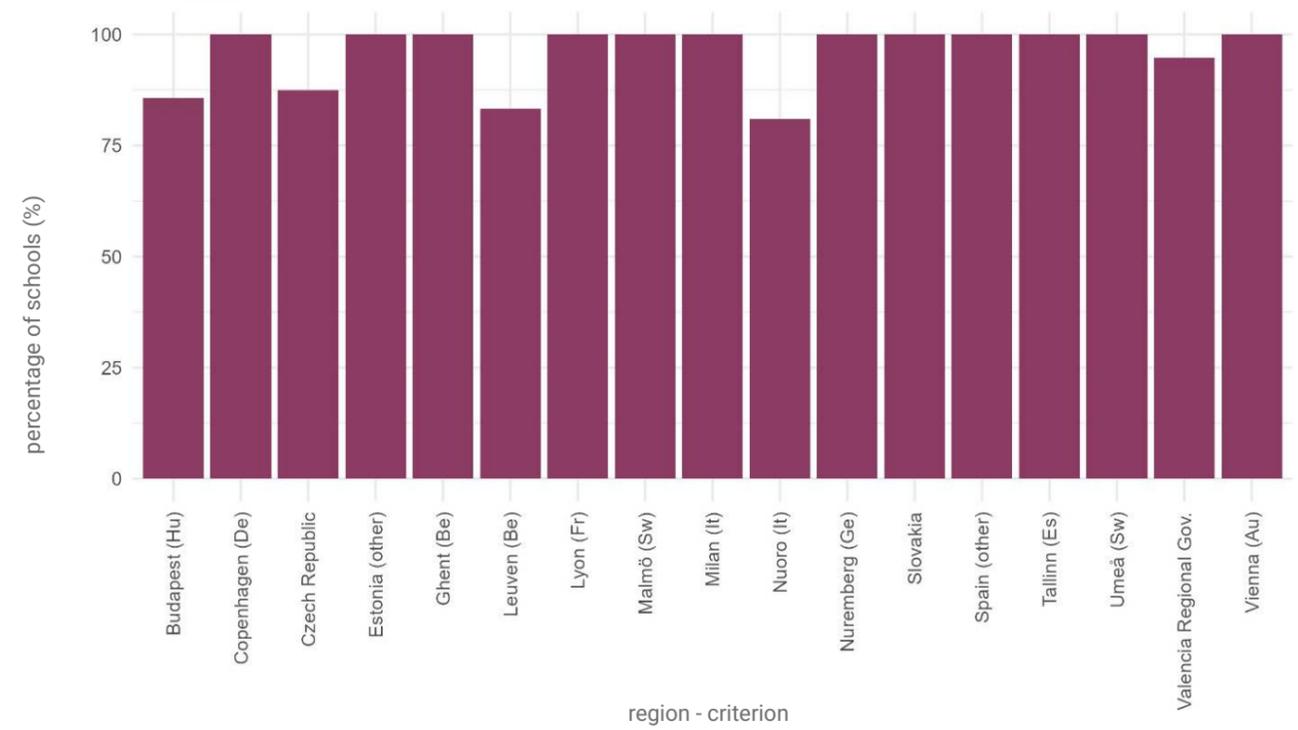
In general, criterion B.3, which involves providing information about the school menu, is mostly met in the participating schools. Notably, lower scores were observed in Budapest, Ghent, and Leuven. In Budapest, schools work with an external caterer, meaning the school itself has limited access to such information and power to make changes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

Criterion B.5, which involves providing guidelines for lunchboxes and/or snacks, shows highly variable results. Whether this variation is due to the “not applicable” clause, is difficult to determine. After all, schools that provide hot meals could still make efforts to guide students in bringing or receiving healthy snacks.

Criterion B.4



Criterion B.5

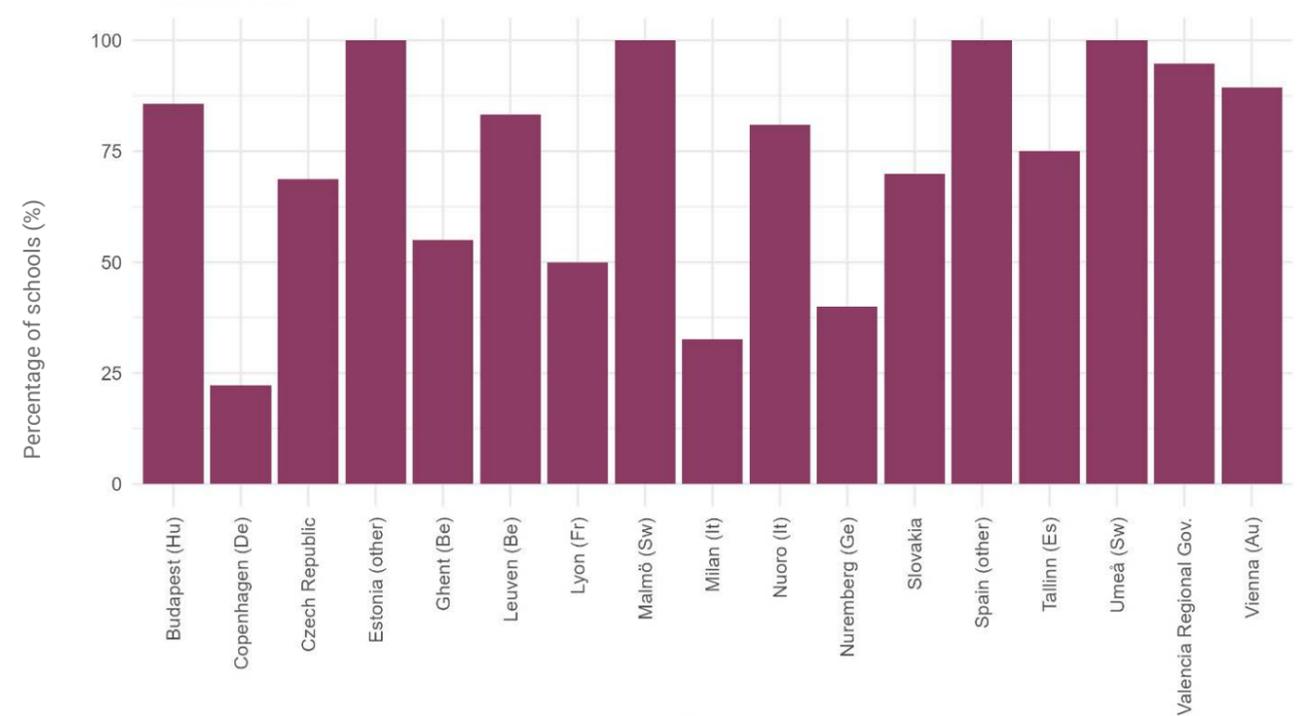
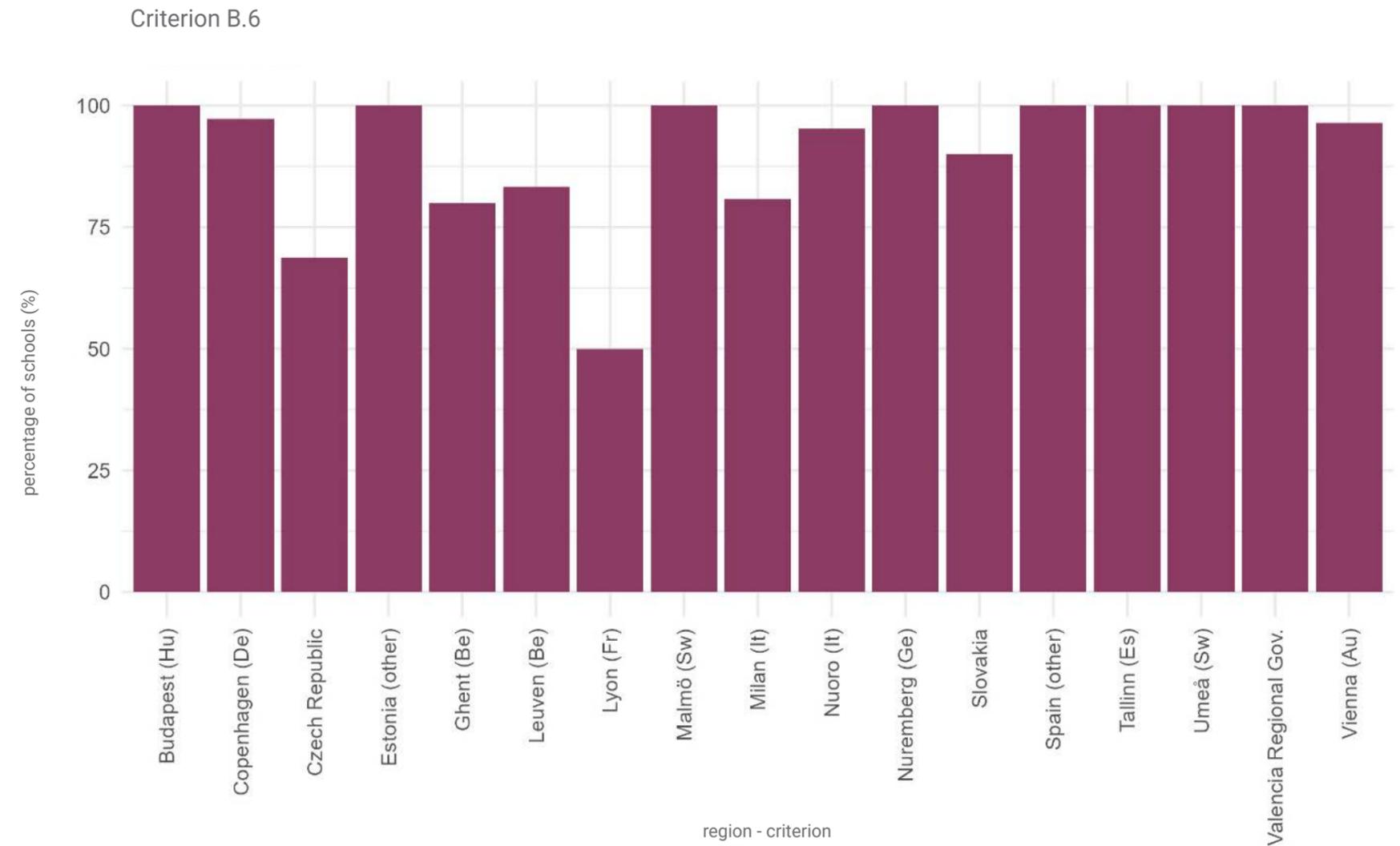


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

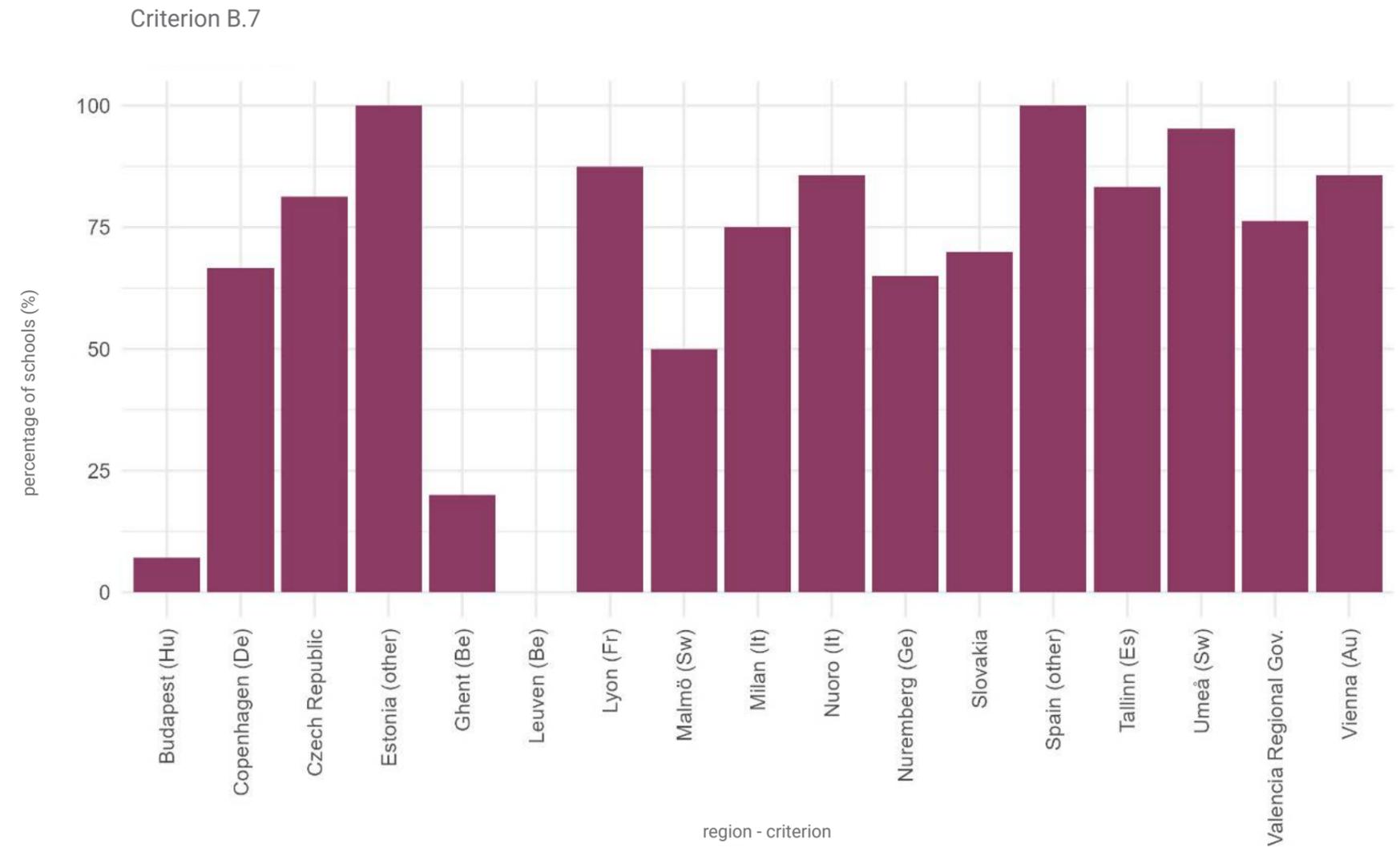


Criterion B.6 specifies that additional provisions are available for students with special dietary needs or requirements. In the figure above, we see very high scores across countries, with half of the regions achieving 100% for B.6.

However, based on the broad description, this criterion may be interpreted as met if vegetarian, halal, lactose-free, gluten-free, or similar alternatives are provided. In this way, economic vulnerability is not yet considered. Criterion B.16 (silver and gold level of implementation) specifically addresses this by assessing solidarity mechanisms.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4



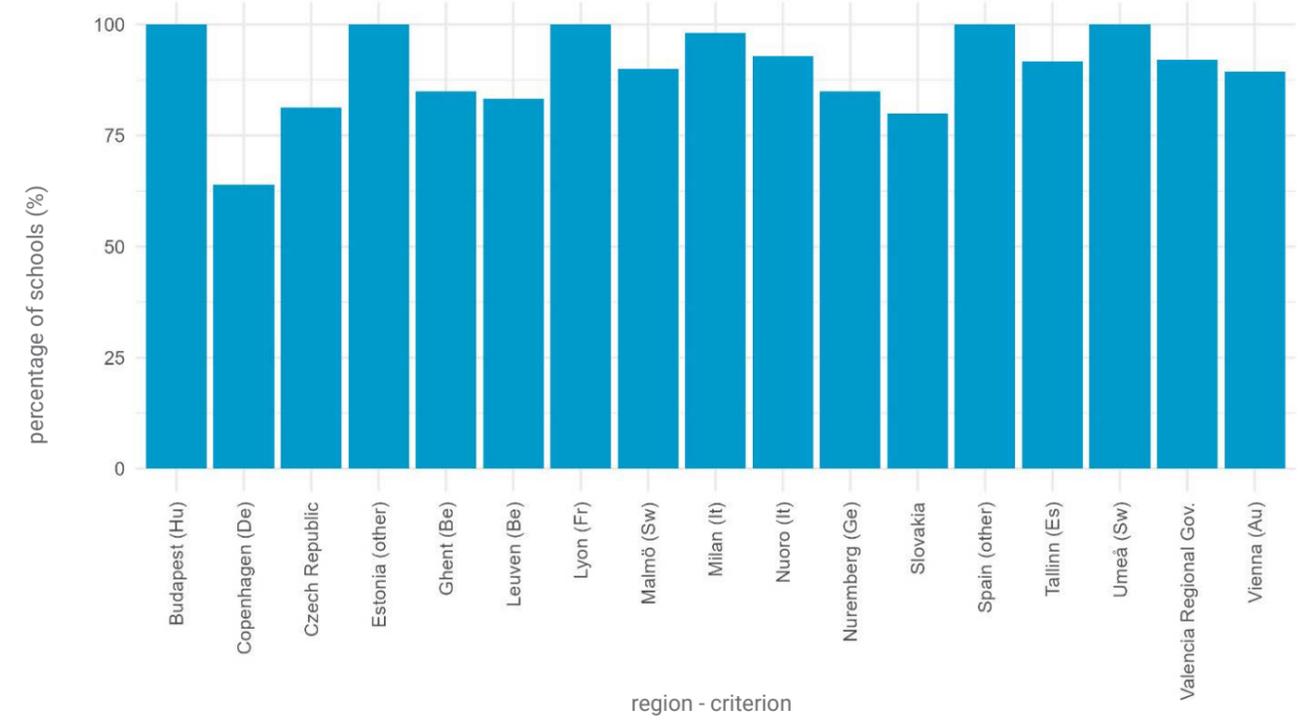
Criterion B.7, which concerns monitoring food waste, also shows variable results. Once again, Budapest, Ghent, and Leuven rank among the lowest, but even Malmö, which generally scores highly, was only able to involve about half of its schools in this practice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

For criterion C.2, which relates to organising activities around growing, harvesting and cooking food, Nuoro stands out with a particularly low result. However, some schools indicated that they have had a school garden in the past or plan to establish one in the future.

Criterion C.1



Criterion C.2

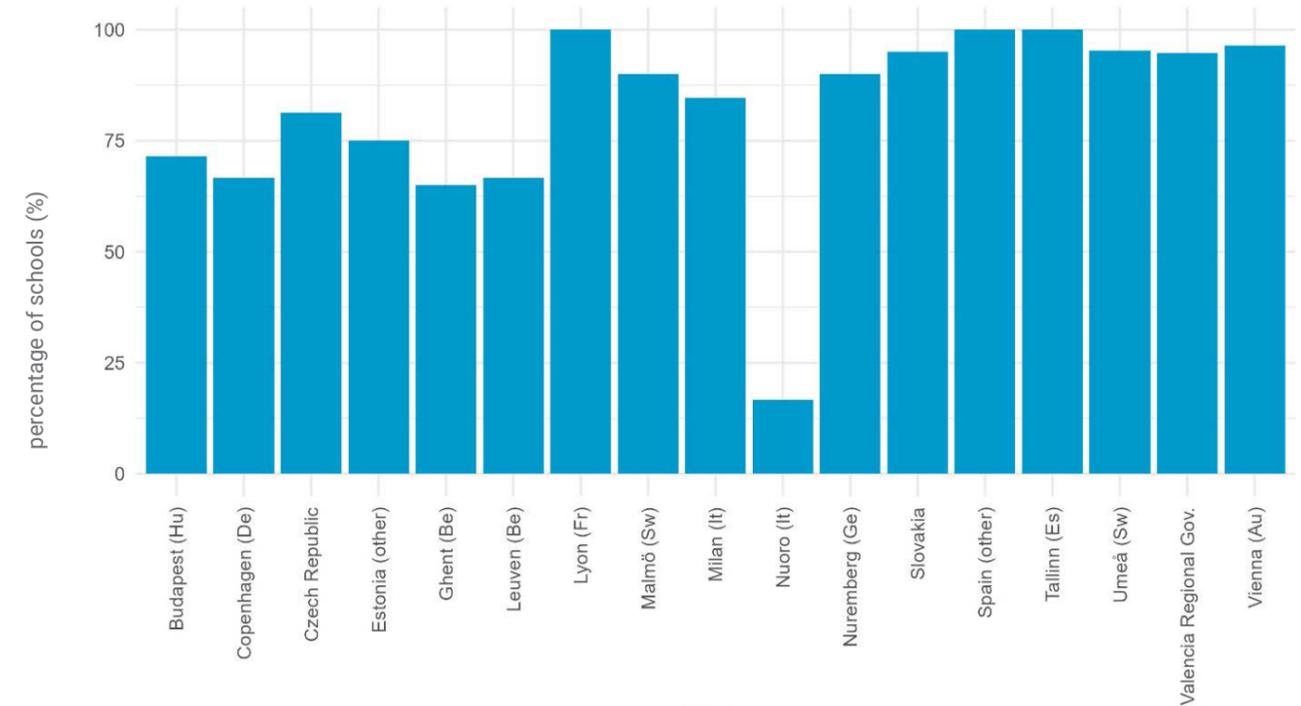
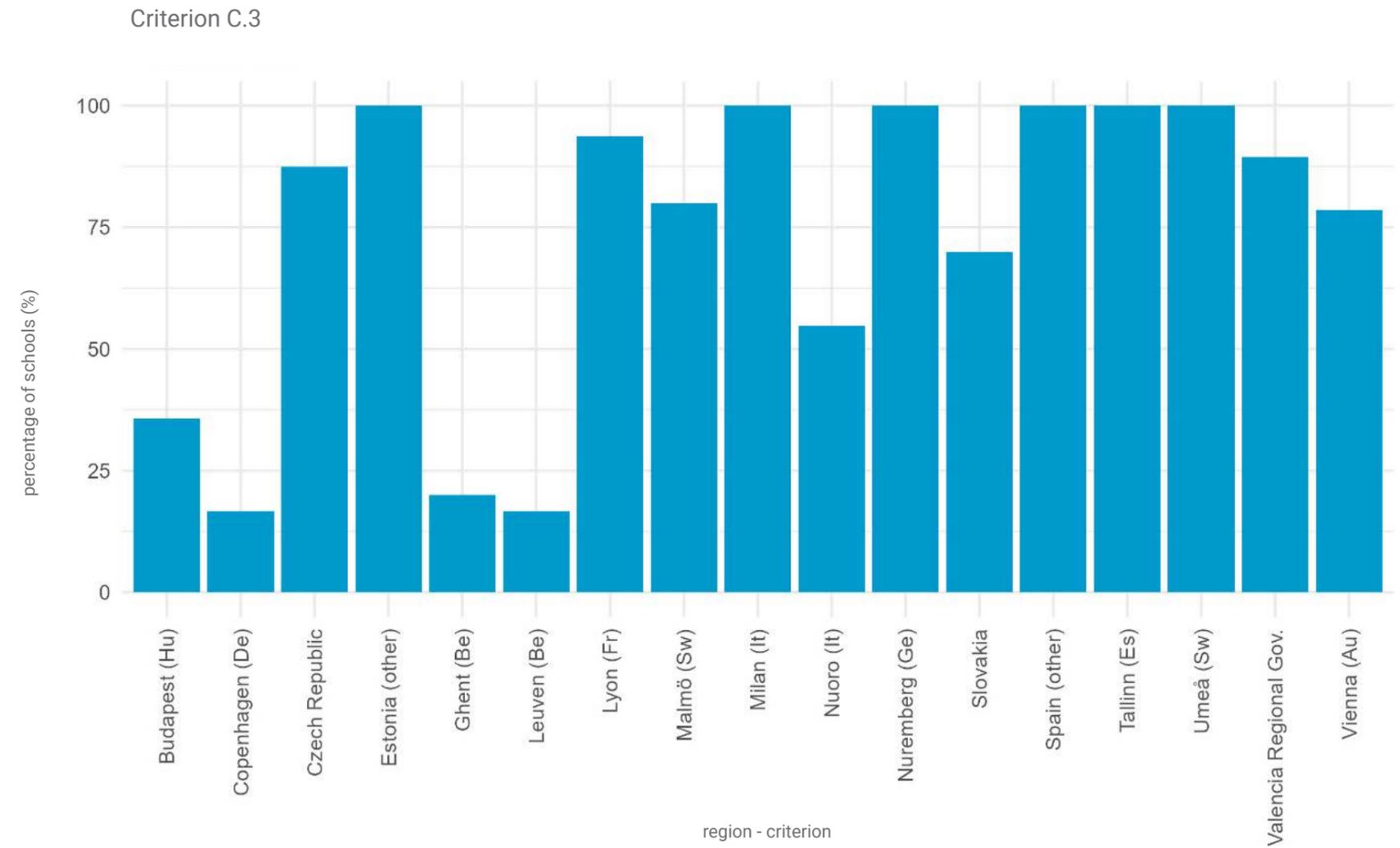


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4



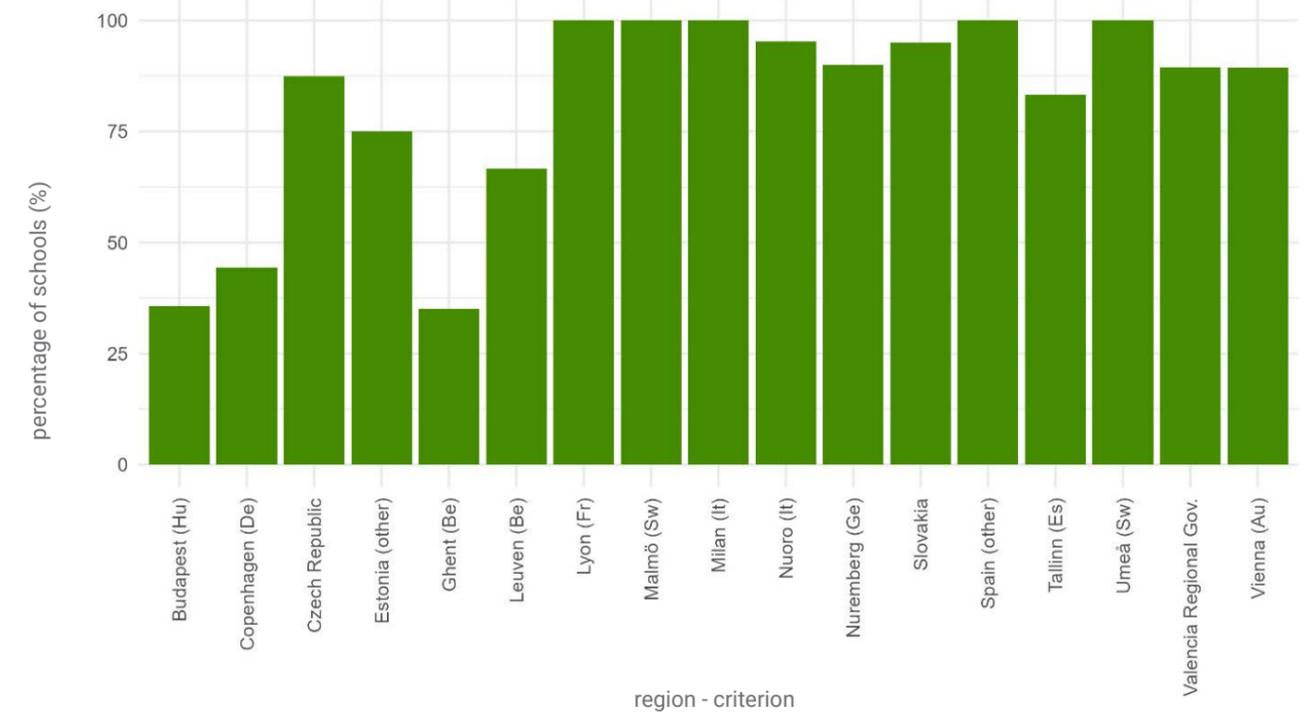
C.3 indicates the extent to which workshops and educational resources are available for teachers and school staff. The results show that this largely depends on the regional or national approach to education and the integration of climate or health topics into school curricula. In Belgium, this presents a significant challenge, whereas in countries such as Estonia and Sweden, implementation proceeds more smoothly.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

Apart from Budapest, Copenhagen, and Ghent, schools seem to have been largely successful in inviting caregivers/parents to specific events or meetings to learn about or discuss the school's food vision. Some schools in Copenhagen reported making efforts in this direction, such as sending out newsletters with this information or providing meals during meetings with the school board. In one school in Ghent, caregivers/parents are also invited to participate in the implementation of a "vegetable shop," an initiative designed to encourage students to fill their lunchboxes with healthy items.

Criterion D.1



Criterion D.2

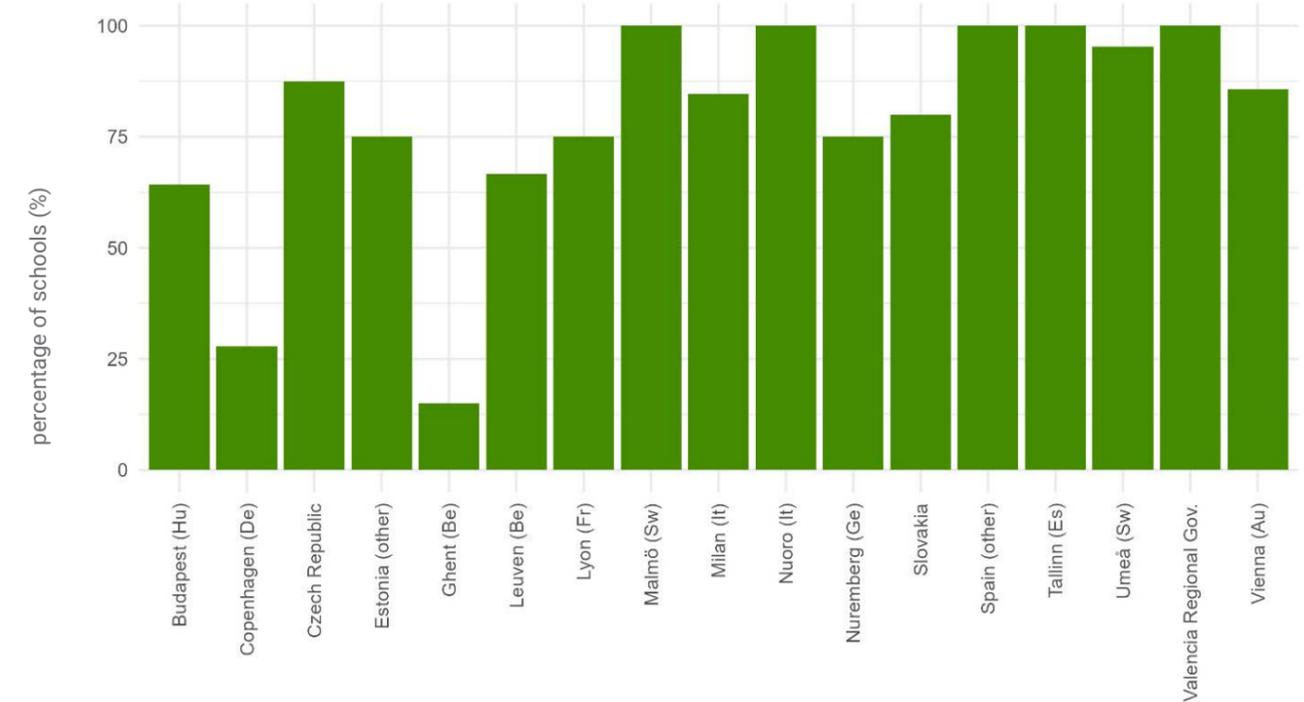


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4

4. Global results: silver and gold level implementation

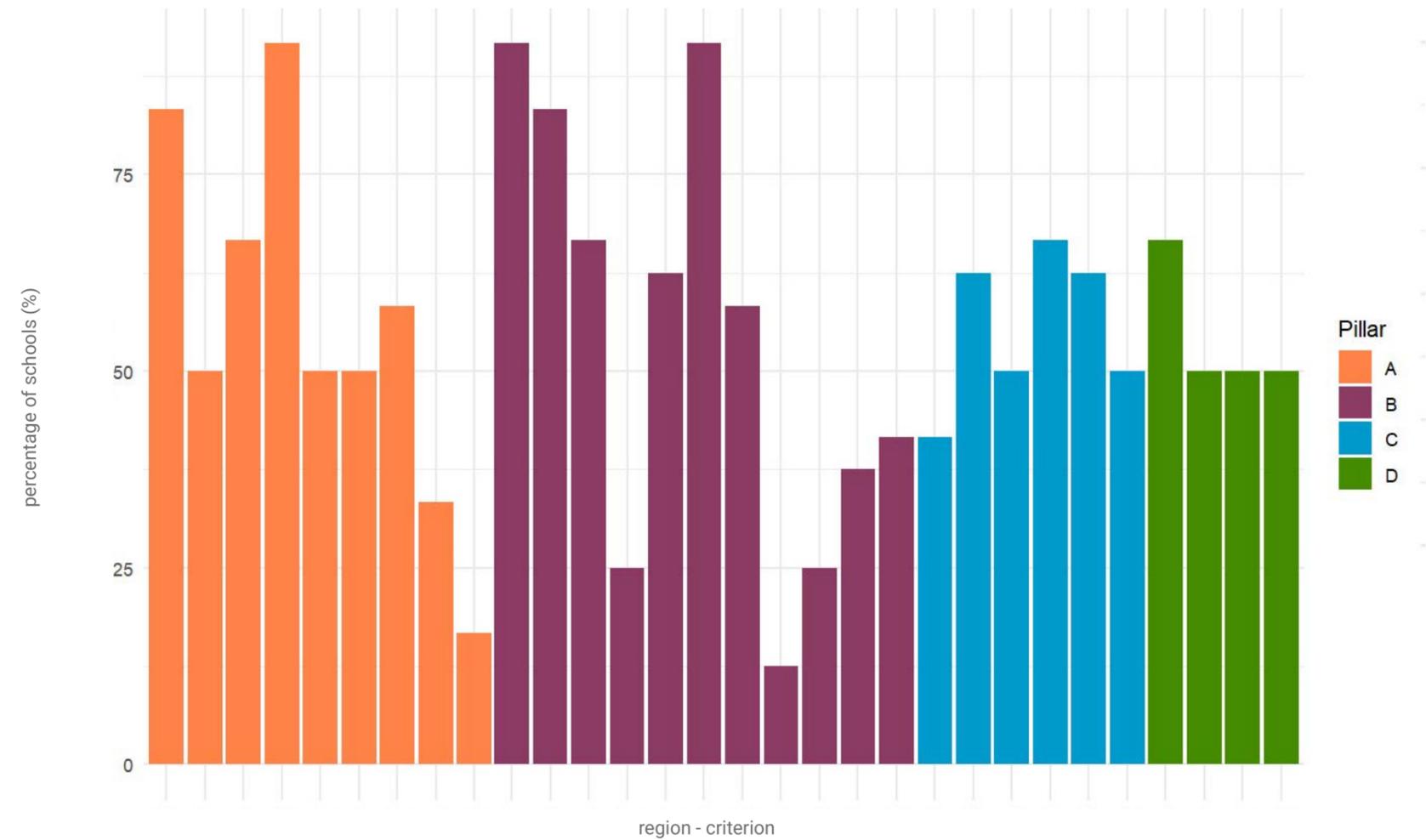


Figure 4: 12 schools filled out the survey for bronze of gold level WSFA implementation.

Twelve schools from Austria and the Czech Republic also completed the survey for the silver and gold level criteria. To achieve the silver level, schools are expected to implement a minimum of 15 additional criteria, while the gold level requires the fulfilment of 27 additional criteria. These data primarily demonstrate that schools are looking beyond the minimum requirements. They are motivated to **continuously improve their food initiatives and use the WSFA framework to explore holistic approaches across the four pillars**. More research needs to be done to see whether every criterion is feasible.

The data do provide insight into which criteria are more easily achieved than others. Figure 4 shows the proportion of schools meeting the silver/gold criteria, we see that at least 80% of these schools reached the goals for A.6, A.9, B.8, B.9, and B.13.

A.6 and A.9 relate, respectively, to involving a caregiver/parent representative in the school food working group and having the WSFA endorsed by school leadership. Within Pillar A (Policy and Leadership), these are accessible yet powerful levers to elevate the integrated approach to a higher and more structured level.

Within Pillar B (Food and Sustainability), B.8 concerns the role of the school canteen as a learning environment for healthy eating habits with staff acting as role models. B.9 evaluates schools' efforts to create enjoyable eating moments. To meet this criterion, schools must survey students and caregivers/parents about the enjoyment of shared meals while also promoting learning about nutrition. Finally, B.13 examines whether schools discourage, limit, or prohibit the consumption of sugary drinks.

Again, Pillars A and B contain criteria that are relatively straightforward to implement. Conversely, some criteria prove more challenging: A.15 was not met, and B.15 also posed significant difficulties.

A.15 involves training students as “food ambassadors” to exchange experiences with schools across the city and even the country. Because this requires the existence of ambassadors in other regions, implementation demands patience and active coordination across the country. National Lead Partners (NLPs) can play a critical role in sustaining this network. It needs to be tested further to see whether this is a feasible criterion.

B.15 relates to influencing regional stakeholders to foster a healthy (physical) environment around the school, such as restricting fast-food chains or avoiding “free donut” promotions in local stores.

The implementation of additional objectives within Pillars C (Food Education) and D (School Environment and Participation) includes organising events and workshops on healthy and ecological food habits for students, parents, teachers, and canteen staff. Ideally, this is done in collaboration with local producers and with a clear focus on practical value.

These activities also strengthen relationships among teachers, parents, students, and kitchen staff. Collective engagement in food initiatives fosters resilience within both the school community and the broader food system.

City/region/country profiles

This chapter presents the results of the SWOT analyses conducted for each city or region²⁶. It begins by highlighting the global findings, providing an overview of common strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified across all locations. Following this, the chapter offers a more detailed examination of the findings for each individual city or region, allowing for a deeper understanding of the specific factors that influence their performance and potential. By structuring the chapter in this way, the reader can first grasp the overall trends before exploring the unique characteristics and challenges of each location.

Global results

Based on the SWOT analyses conducted across all cities and regions, some clear lessons emerge that apply regardless of a city's current weaknesses or strengths.

Here are 4 main lessons:

1. Lasting impact requires a **systemic approach**, addressing all pillars: Policy & Leadership, Food & Sustainability, Education & Learning, and Community & Partnership rather than focusing on just one area.
2. Cities benefit from building **strong networks and partnerships**.
3. **Actions** need to be embedded into local strategies and budgets to ensure continuity.
4. **Start with small, manageable projects** that can be gradually scaled.

These overarching insights set the stage for the more detailed, city-specific findings that follow, providing a framework for understanding the unique strengths, challenges, and opportunities of each location.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

This publication was produced by Rikolto in the framework of the EU-funded Horizon project SchoolFood4Change.

Author: Annelies Smets

Co-author: Yer Hanssen

Data analysis: Yer Hanssen

Review: Charlotte Flechet, Thibault Geerardyn, Katharina Beelen, Katrien Verbeke, Tom Vaclavik, Irene Vidal, Monika Rut, Chloé Van Uytven

Layout: Jonas Jatidjan

Special thanks to all the people who dedicated their time in the past years to make 'our' WSFA-framework work in real-life settings. We could not have done this without all the wonderful people that joined the SchoolFood4Change consortium, and who actively engaged in the many discussions on this topic.

We would also like to expressly thank the people who worked with true *boots on the ground* and helped shape SchoolFood4Change

in daily practice: the teachers, chefs, and school leaders. Thanks to their commitment, flexibility and belief in change, the WSFA framework became tangible and workable in real school settings.

A warm word of thanks also goes to the people working in the cities and local authorities that supported the schools, and were often willing to step beyond their own comfort zones. Your openness to taking on new roles and questioning established ways of working was crucial to the success of this project.

A special word of thanks goes to the expert group. Although the group was large and diverse, we would like to express particular appreciation to the experts from Skutečně Zdravá Škola (CZ and SK), WWF Sweden, Mensa Cívica, Danachda, Speiseräume, Eating City, Fondazione Ecosistemi and ICLEI. Thank you for sharing your expertise, critical reflections, and practical insights, which greatly enriched the development of this work and strengthened its relevance across different contexts.

A final and heartfelt thank you goes to Katrien Verbeke for actively contributing to reflections on how we could continuously improve our work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Footnotes

¹ <https://schoolfood4change.eu/>

² https://health.ec.europa.eu/funding/eu4health-programme-2021-2027-vision-healthier-european-union_nl

³ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2021.223.01.0014.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A223%3ATOC

⁵ Phelps, N. H., Singleton, R. K., Zhou, B., Heap, R. A., Mishra, A., Bennett, J. E., ... & Barbagallo, C. M. (2024). Worldwide trends in underweight and obesity from 1990 to 2022: a pooled analysis of 3663 population-representative studies with 222 million children, adolescents, and adults. *The Lancet*, 403(10431), 1027-1050. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)02750-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)02750-2)

⁶ Rakić JG, Hamrik Z, Dzielska A, Felder-Puig R, Oja L, Bakalár P et al. A focus on adolescent physical activity, eating behaviours, weight status and body image in Europe, central Asia and Canada. *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey. Volume 4.* Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2024. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

⁷ Rakić JG, Hamrik Z, Dzielska A, Felder-Puig R, Oja L, Bakalár P et al. A focus on adolescent physical activity, eating behaviours, weight status and body image in Europe, central Asia and Canada. *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey. Volume 4.* Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2024. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

⁸ <https://www.rikolto.org/projects/good-food-at-school-in-belgium>

⁹ The WSFA framework and checklist were developed by a working group composed of experienced project partners: World Wildlife Fund Sweden and Danachda (school education), Speiseräume (school kitchens), Copenhagen (city-level food policy), Ghent (sustainable procurement), and International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements and the Fair-Trade Advocacy Office (organic and fair trade). In addition, other partners brought experience in school-based programs, including Zdrava škola ("Truly Healthy School Meals Model", inspired by the United Kingdom's "Food4Life" initiative) and Rikolto ("GoodFood@School" program). Also, partners like Mensa Cívica, Fondazione Ecosistemi, and Eating City joined voluntarily

¹⁰ https://schoolfood4change.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/SF4C-Yearly-State-of-Play.pdf_compressed.pdf ; <https://schoolfood4change.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2024-SF4C-Yearly-State-of-Play-Rikolto.pdf> ; https://schoolfood4change.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Rikolto_opmaak-brochure_2025_edited.pdf

¹¹ https://schoolfood4change.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Farm-to-School-Twinning-concept_report.pdf ; https://schoolfood4change.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/FS2-twinning_compressed-1.pdf

¹² Sabet, F., & Böhm, S. (2024). Towards sustainable school food: An experiential planetary health framework integrating meals and food education. *British Educational Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4100>

¹³ FAO (2020). School-based food and nutrition education – A white paper on the current state, principles, challenges and recommendations for low- and middle-income countries. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb2064en>

¹⁴ JRC (2025). Criteria for Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) for Food, Food services, and Vending machines, p. 58. <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC144182> <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC139495>

¹⁵ More information about the tender process: <https://hub.urgenci.net/beacons/copenhagen-potatoe-tender-process/>

¹⁶ City officials specifically requested input for educational tools. In response, Rikolto organized sessions on educational materials through a webinar and at a general assembly – an annual meeting of project partners – as well as during an NLP meeting. The topic was also addressed in a workshop with pre-service teachers from the University of Rotterdam.

¹⁷ More information about EIT Food Educators: <https://www.eitfood.eu/projects/food-educators>

¹⁸ Meadows, D. (2008) *Thinking in systems*.

^{19,20} Vidal, I. et al (2026) *The Whole School Food Approach: A European framework and implementation to promote healthy and sustainable school food systems*, p2 <https://schoolfood4change.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/1-s2.0-S0091743525002245-main.pdf>

²¹ See Kobo survey results, figure one, annexe

²² Council of the European Union (2021). Council recommendation Establishing a European Child Guarantee. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9106-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

²³ Vidal et al. (2026) *The Whole School Food Approach: A European framework and implementation to promote healthy and sustainable school food systems*, p.5. <https://schoolfood4change.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/1-s2.0-S0091743525002245-main.pdf>

²⁴ The analysis in this report is based on two main sources: Kobo survey data and interviews with city coordinators and NLP staff to contextualize Kobo results. Participating schools or, in some cases, city officials indicated whether each of the 17 bronze criteria had been met. Responses were converted into numerical scores (1 = yes, 0.5 = partially, 0 = no) and aggregated at regional level. Results represent the proportion of schools within each region that reached a given criterion.

²⁵ The Kobo survey asked each participating school or in some cases, the coordinating city official to indicate to what extent they had achieved the bronze-level WSFA criteria. Responses were converted into numerical scores (1 for "yes", 0.5 for "partially", 0 for "no") and aggregated at regional level. Percentages shown throughout this chapter therefore represent the proportion of participating schools within a region that reached a given criterion. Where fewer than three schools completed the survey, results are presented at national level.

²⁶ The SWOT analysis was conducted by Rikolto staff who authored this report, based on the results of a Kobo survey and interviews with city coordinators or NLP staff. In addition to listing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, a key recommendations was formulated for each profile. These are directed at schools, cities, and other authorities and aim to strengthen the functioning of the WSFA. In the figures, the percentage of schools in each region meeting a given criterion is shown. The colored bars represent local scores, while the dots indicate the European average. Criteria are labeled with their respective codes. For full descriptions, see Appendix X.