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Healthy eating promotion at the workplace: the European programme FOOD (Fighting Obesity through Offer and Demand)

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The FOOD programme aims at positively influencing employees' health and well-being by promoting healthy eating habits during the working day. Two complementary target groups are involved: workers and commercial restaurants, making the healthy choice more obvious and more accessible.

The FOOD programme was initiated as a pilot project in 2009 thanks to the co-funding of the European Commission (DG SANTE).

Edenred, as lead partner and coordinator, proposed to representatives of Public Health Authorities, nutritionists, Research centres and Universities to form a Consortium of partners in six countries (BE, CZ, FR, IT, ES, SE). The partners chose to follow a five-step methodology with a strong evaluation, enabling a qualitative and adapted set of actions.

Most of the 28-month project were dedicated to understand the habits and knowledge of the target groups before generating

adapted recommendations. They had to be simple, ready to apply but at the same time being ambitious enough. Health messages were then spread through national and European communication campaigns in the six participating countries, using the Ticket Restaurant as a unique channel to reach the target groups.

Despite the end of the EU funding in 2011, the partners decided to take advantage of the actions and results and continued the actions under a long-term programme.

As such, La Academia (formerly Fundación Española de Dietistas-Nutricionistas) joined the programme in 2015.

In parallel, the work of the partners reached international recognition: indeed, the FOOD project was presented as a health prevention best practice at the 19th World Congress on Safety and Health at Work in 2011 and selected by the

European Commission as one of the best funded EU project of its 2nd health programme.

Today, the FOOD programme is a strong public private partnership gathering 26 partners from 10 Member States: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Slovakia and recently Romania. Over 380 communication tools have reached 6.9 million employees within 251000 companies and 521000 restaurants. A dedicated network of more than 4000 restaurants adhering to the FOOD recommendations has also been created in order to link more accurately the demand of workers for healthy option at lunch time.

As part of the evaluation, European barometers have been launched every year since 2012 in order to understand and analyse societal changes and needs of employees and restaurants. The outcomes reflect a growing interest regarding balanced nutrition from both offer and demand sides. For instance, 85% of EU employees consider that the nutritional quality of the meal is an important lever when choosing a restaurant. This general trend was also confirmed by the questionnaire addressed to restaurant owners, as 64% of them have a low level of knowledge and would like to learn more about balanced nutrition.

Since 2012, 82600 employees and 7700 restaurants answered the questionnaires.

conflict of interests

Author works for Edenred.

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