

ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS IN IRISH HOT SCHOOL MEALS

POLICY ANALYSIS AND MENU EVALUATION IN AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

AIM OF OUR STUDY

- Our national standards are nutrient-based and do not regulate food processing, despite concerns about UPFs.
- Compare how Ireland and the UK, Denmark, Sweden, France, and Brazil regulate processing and UPFs in school meal policy.
- Quantify the extent of UPFs and HFSS provision in Irish Hot School Meals menus relative to international guidelines & standards.

METHODS

A mixed-methods study combining policy analysis with menu investigation of school meal policies from Ireland, the UK, Denmark, Sweden, France & Brazil.

+ Publicly available menus from three major Irish providers (covering 40.6% of schools) were checked against 30% of WHO daily recommendations for 7–9-year-olds.



RESULTS

- In countries researched, only Brazil embeds NOVA in legislation, mandating high levels of procurement for fresh/minimally processed products and limiting UPFs.
- France and Sweden indirectly constrain UPFs & processing through sustainability and fresh foods.
- Ireland and the UK apply nutrient/HFSS (high fat, sugar, salt) standards without fresh-food quotas or processing monitoring.

DISTRIBUTION OF NOVA 4 UPF FOOD MEALS BY IRISH SUPPLIER (N=15)

Supplier	NOVA 4 Meals (n)	NOVA 4 %
Carambola	3	60%
The Lunch Bag	3	60%
Glanmore Foods	5	100%
Total	15	73%

Fibre provision varied by 51.6% across suppliers (1.9–3.4g/portion), Saturated fat at 27.1%, Energy at 54.39%, while sugars ranged from 34.3%.* *Macronutrient Profile of Provider Menus Compared with

Caroline Walker Trust School Lunch Standards for primary school children aged 5–11 years

Key Message: UPFs provide consistent microbial safety, extended shelf-life, & reliable fortification. (Monteiro et al. 2019)

The goal should be to rebalance school lunches with more minimally processed foods & use UPFs sparingly and strategically.



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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Government School Lunch rules specify a defined share of spend on fresh vegetables, pulses & minimally processed foods, with a portion mandated to come from local or regional producers, thereby favouring these supply chains.
- Explicit processing-level criteria are mandated & compliance enforcement by independent processes
- Long term, investment in school kitchen infrastructure and workforce, move towards a more Swedish or French model of from-scratch cooking, similar to best practice.
- Future work to systematically sample school meal portion sizes and recipes from providers and observational studies of actual consumption (e.g. plate-waste analysis) Linking NOVA-based menu data with individual-level dietary surveys and health outcomes for children in mid to long-term

