

Assessment of consumer exposure to nutrition information on food labels. Penetration study across the EU-27 plus Turkey

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Background/aims: FLABEL (Food Labelling to Advance Better Education for Life, www.flabel.org) is a project funded under the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme. Its objective is to understand how nutrition information on food labels affects dietary choices and consumer habits. Fundamental to this objective is the assessment of current exposure of consumers to nutrition information on food labels. At present, few data exist on the penetration of nutrition information on food labels in Europe, with previous studies involving only a small subset of countries and not looking at all products within a product category¹.

The present study aimed at designing and conducting a reproducible audit, assessing the current penetration of nutrition information on food labels in various product categories in the EU-27 plus Turkey, and to identify the major ways in which nutrition information is provided on labels.

Methods: In each of the 27 EU countries plus Turkey, three types of retailers were chosen for a physical audit: a retailer within the top 5 in terms of market share, a national retailer or consumer cooperative, and a discounter. The product categories examined were sweet biscuits, breakfast cereals, ready meals, carbonated soft drinks and yoghurts. A data collection grid was designed to record where nutrition information occurred on the pack (front-of-pack vs. elsewhere), in which format it was given (e.g., nutrition table), which nutrients were covered and whether nutrition or health claims were present.

Results: More than 37,000 products were audited. The majority of products - on average 85% - in the 5 categories in all countries contained nutrition information of some kind (highest in Ireland, UK and The Netherlands at > 95%, lowest in Cyprus and Slovenia at < 75%). By far the most wide-spread format across all countries was the nutrition table on back of pack, stating either the big 4 (calories, protein, carbohydrates, fat) or the big 8 (big 4 plus sugar, saturated fat, fibre and sodium/salt). Overall, breakfast cereals was the category with the highest penetration of nutrition information, displaying some kind of nutrition information back of pack on 94% of products and front of pack on 70% of products. Nutrition claims and Guideline Daily Amounts (GDA) were the most prevalent front-of-pack forms of nutrition information with up to 37% and 63% penetration, respectively. Some of these results are shown in graphs, overleaf.

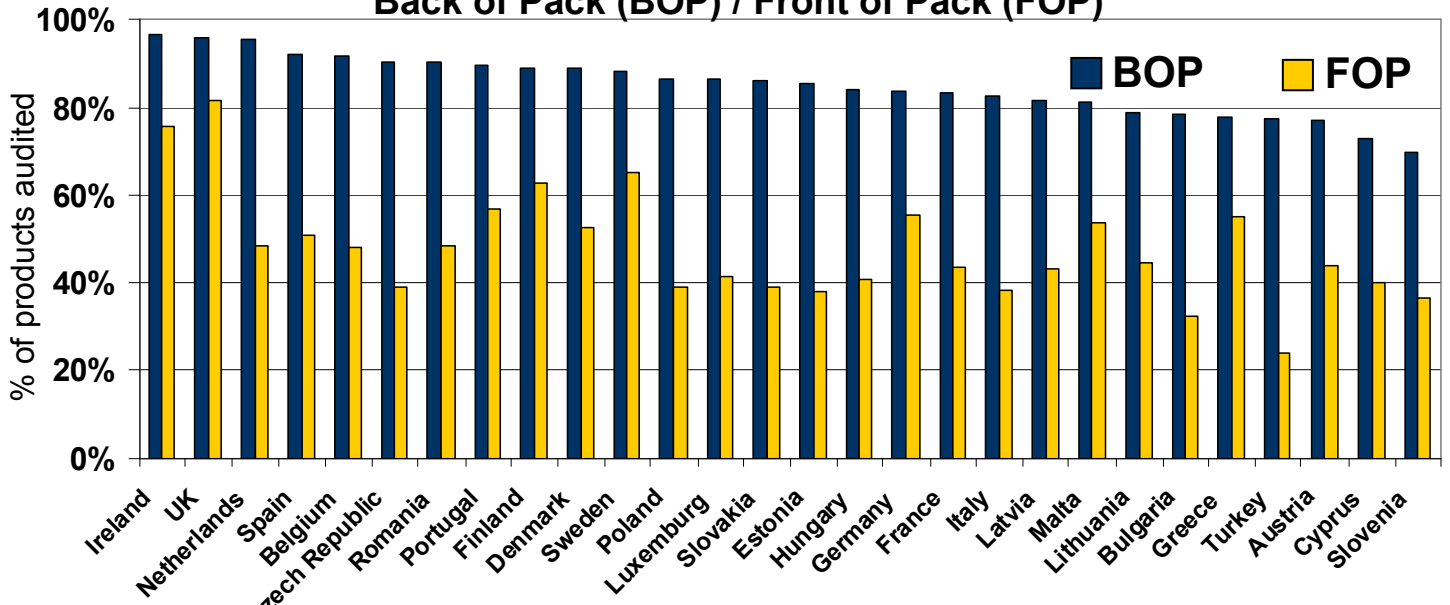
Conclusions: Nutrition information was found on a large majority of products audited and its presence seems higher than reported previously. These findings provide a solid starting ground for subsequent studies involving attention, reading, liking, understanding and use by consumers of different nutrition labelling formats.

References:

- ¹ EAS, *The introduction of mandatory nutrition labelling in the European Union: An impact assessment*. (Belgium DG SANCO, 2004):32

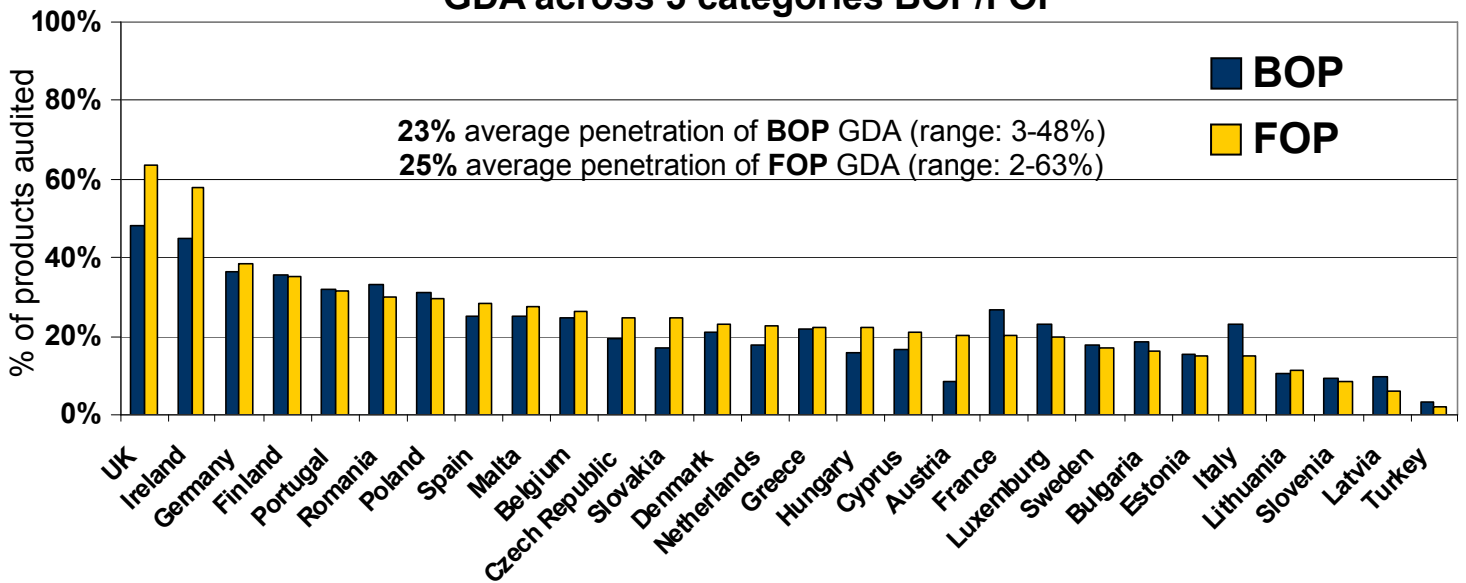
For further information about FLABEL, contact info@flabel.org

Nutrition information across 5 categories Back of Pack (BOP) / Front of Pack (FOP)



85% average penetration of **BOP** nutrition information of any kind
48% average penetration of **FOP** nutrition information of any kind

GDA across 5 categories BOP/FOP



Nutrition claims across 5 categories BOP/FOP

