



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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.

WSFA Implementation in

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Introduction

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.

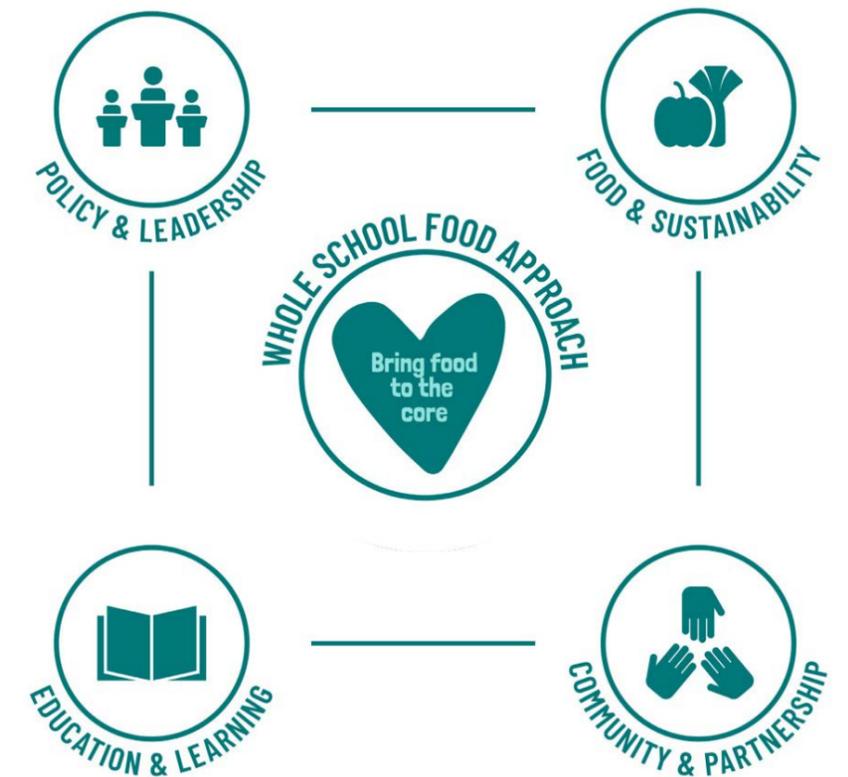


Figure: framework of the Whole School Food Approach and its 4 mutually reinforcing pillars.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.

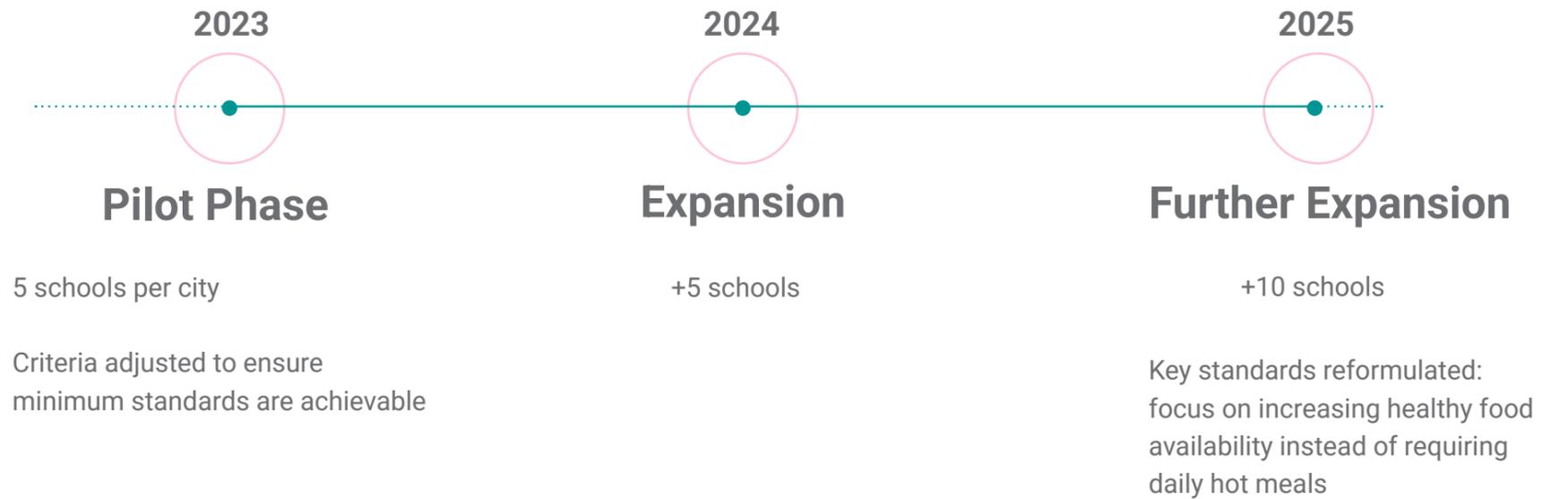


TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.

WSFA Implementation in

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.

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

© Layla Aerts

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

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 2

What support is needed for schools?

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.

WSFA Implementation in

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

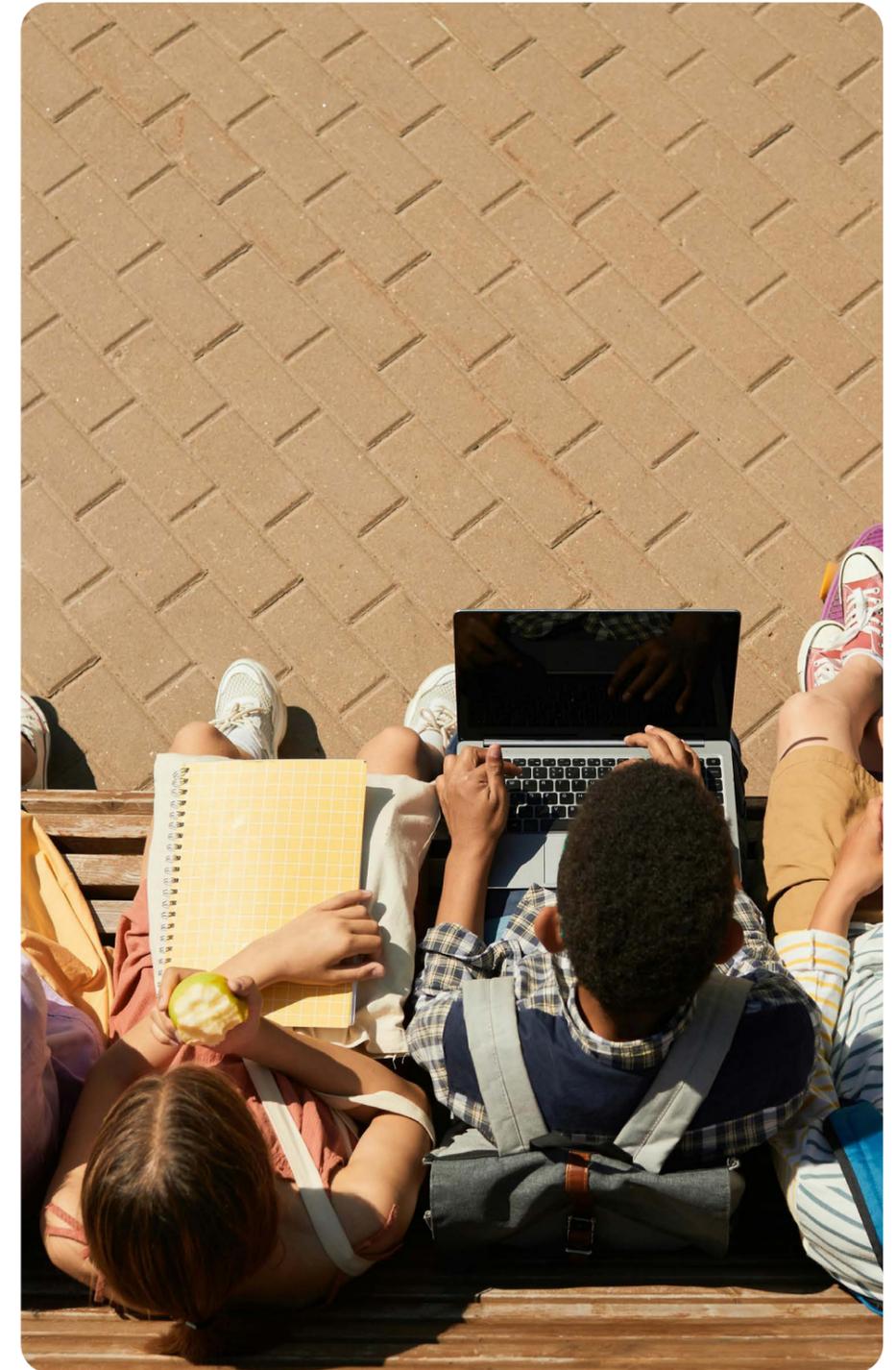
Chapter 2

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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.**

WSFA Implementation in

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.

WSFA Implementation in

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 3

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.

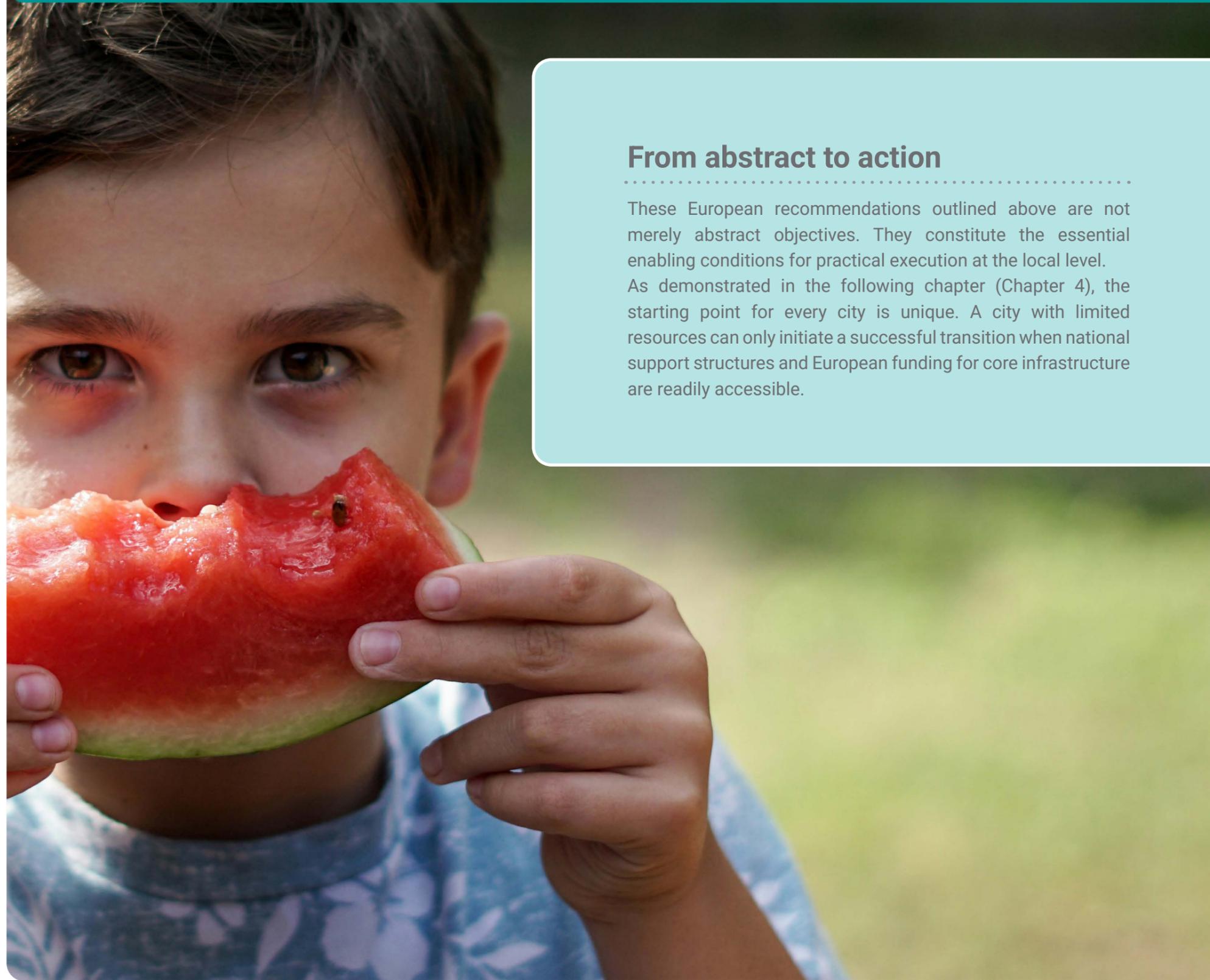
TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.

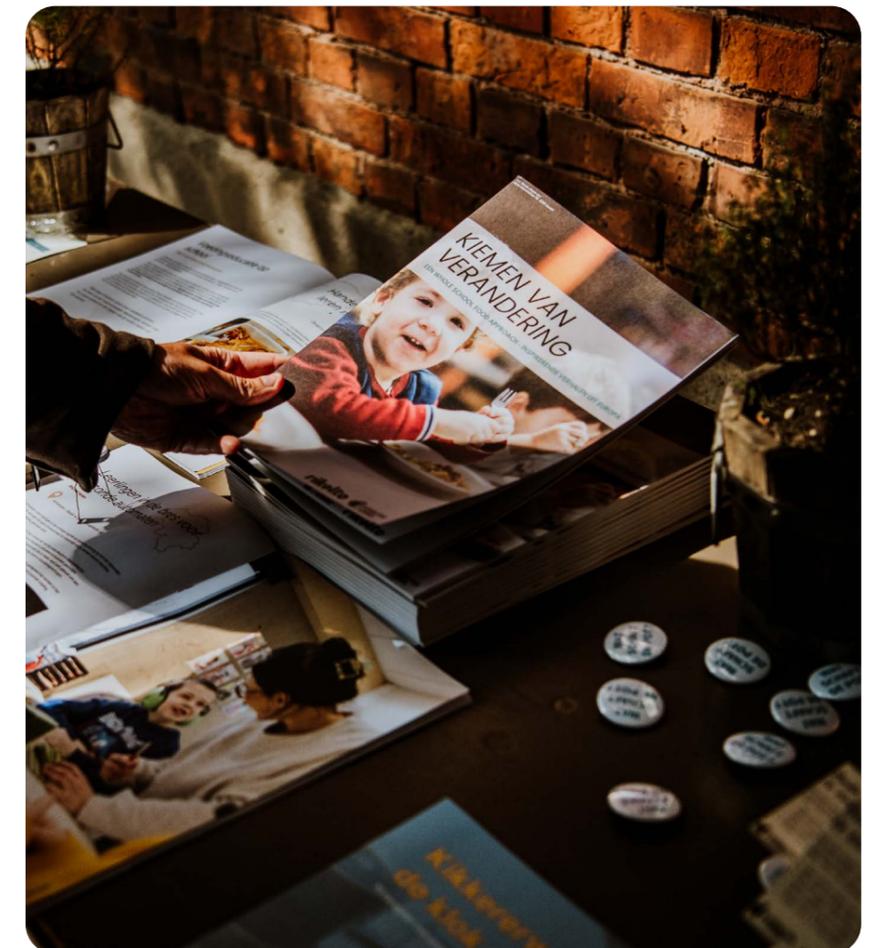
WSFA Implementation in

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

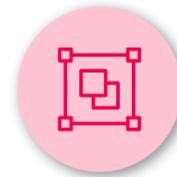
WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Analysis of Kobo-survey results

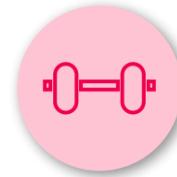
This chapter reflects on the qualitative results gathered through Kobo-survey²⁵. It includes figures and tables showing performance per region and the extent to which individual criteria were met. At the same time, it highlights learning opportunities and inspiring practices that can guide the next phases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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

1. Global results for achievement level bronze

KEY INSIGHT

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

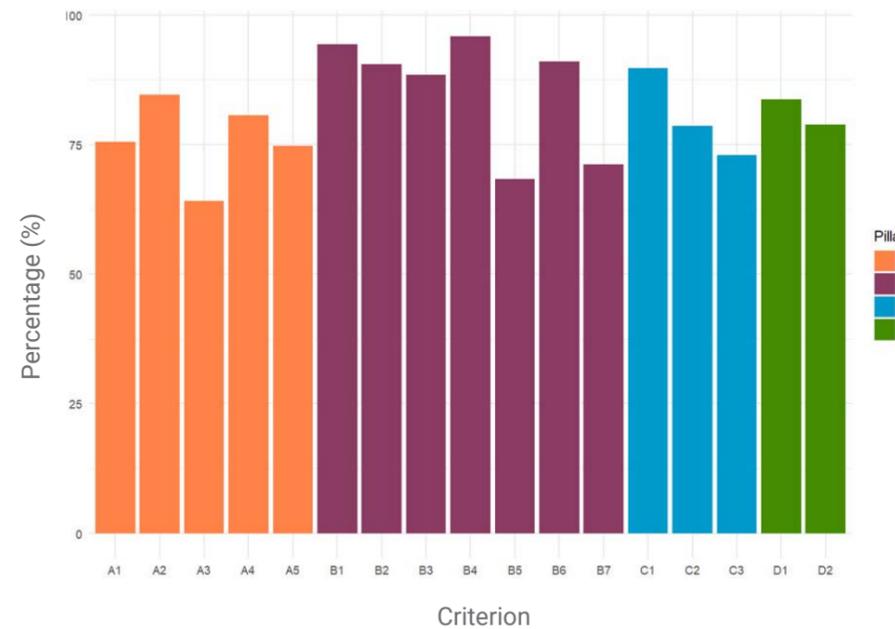


Figure 1: histogram of the percentages achieved per criterion.

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.

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.

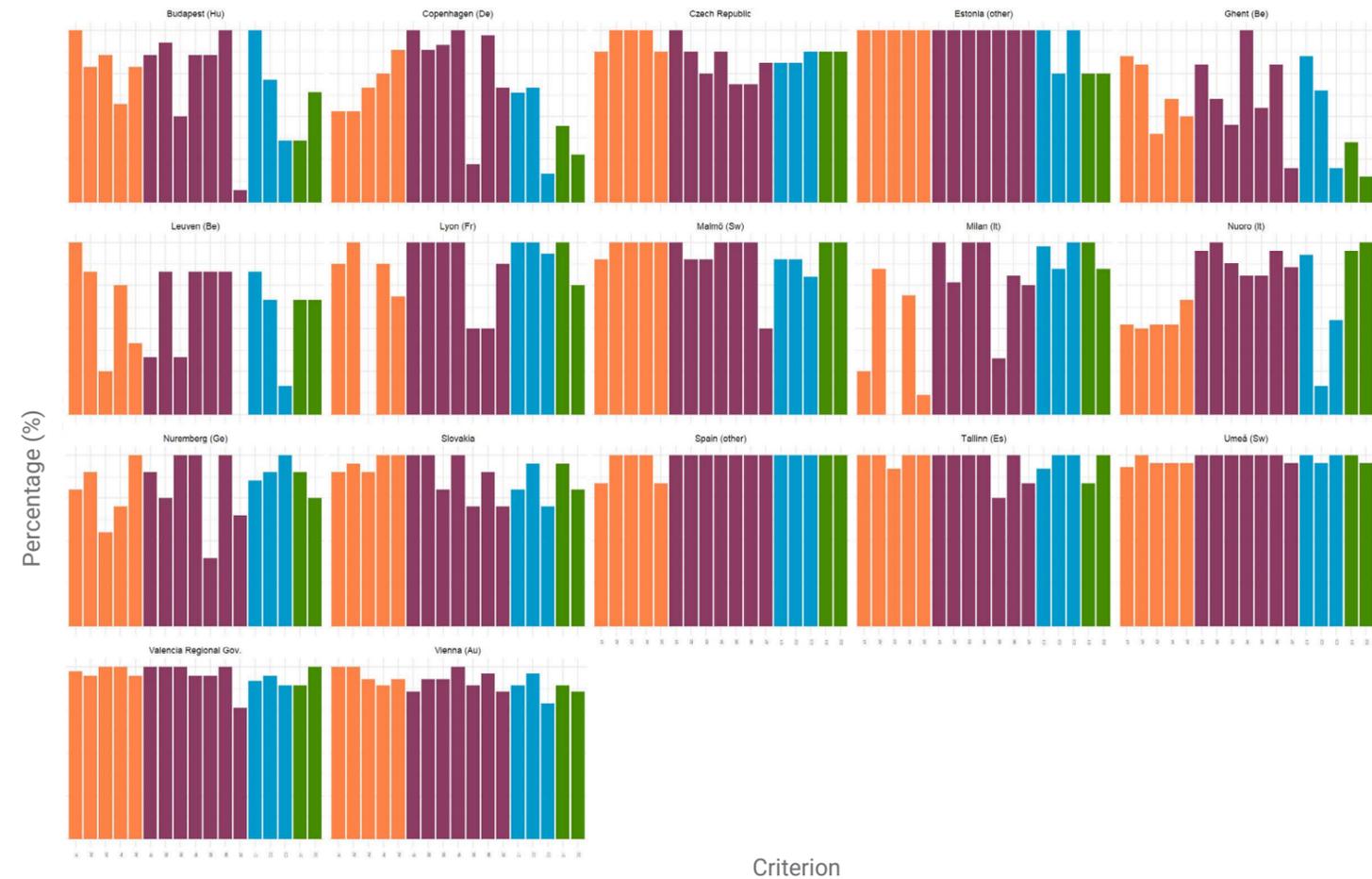


Figure 1: overview of criteria achieved per region

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

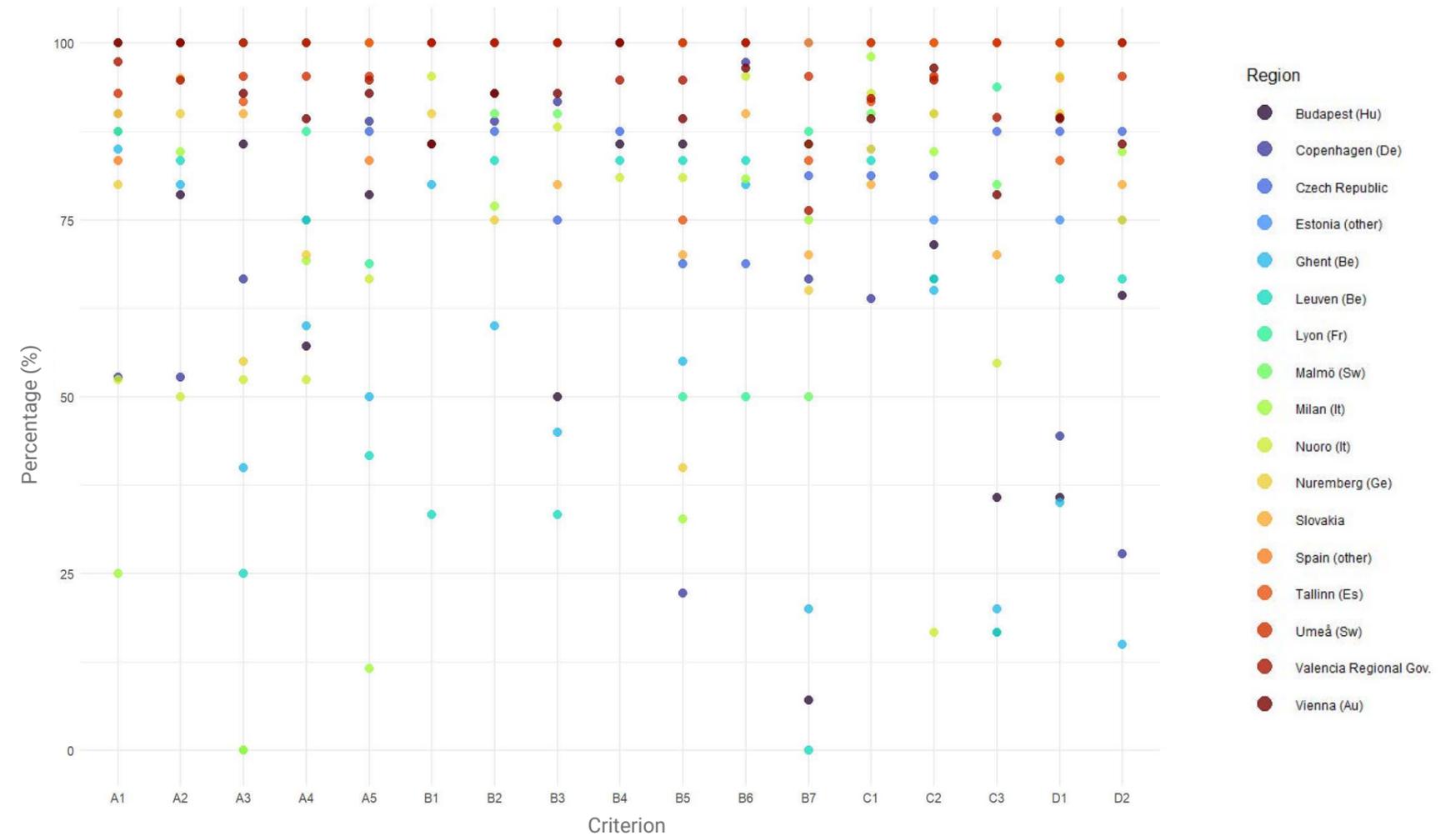


Figure 2: overview of each region's profile across the 17 bronze criteria.

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

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

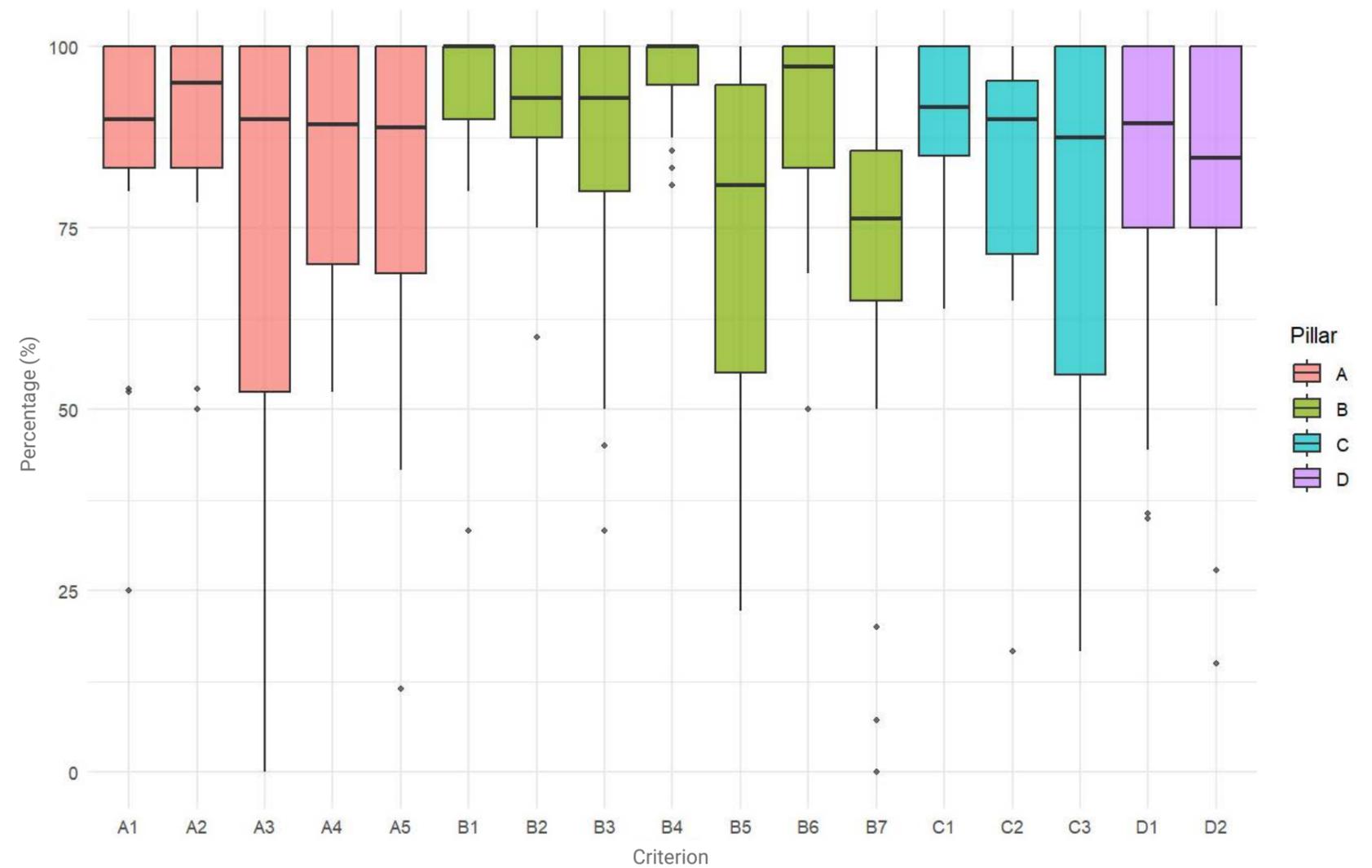


Figure 3: boxplot for percentages of schools per region

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

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

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Overview of percentages per region per criterion

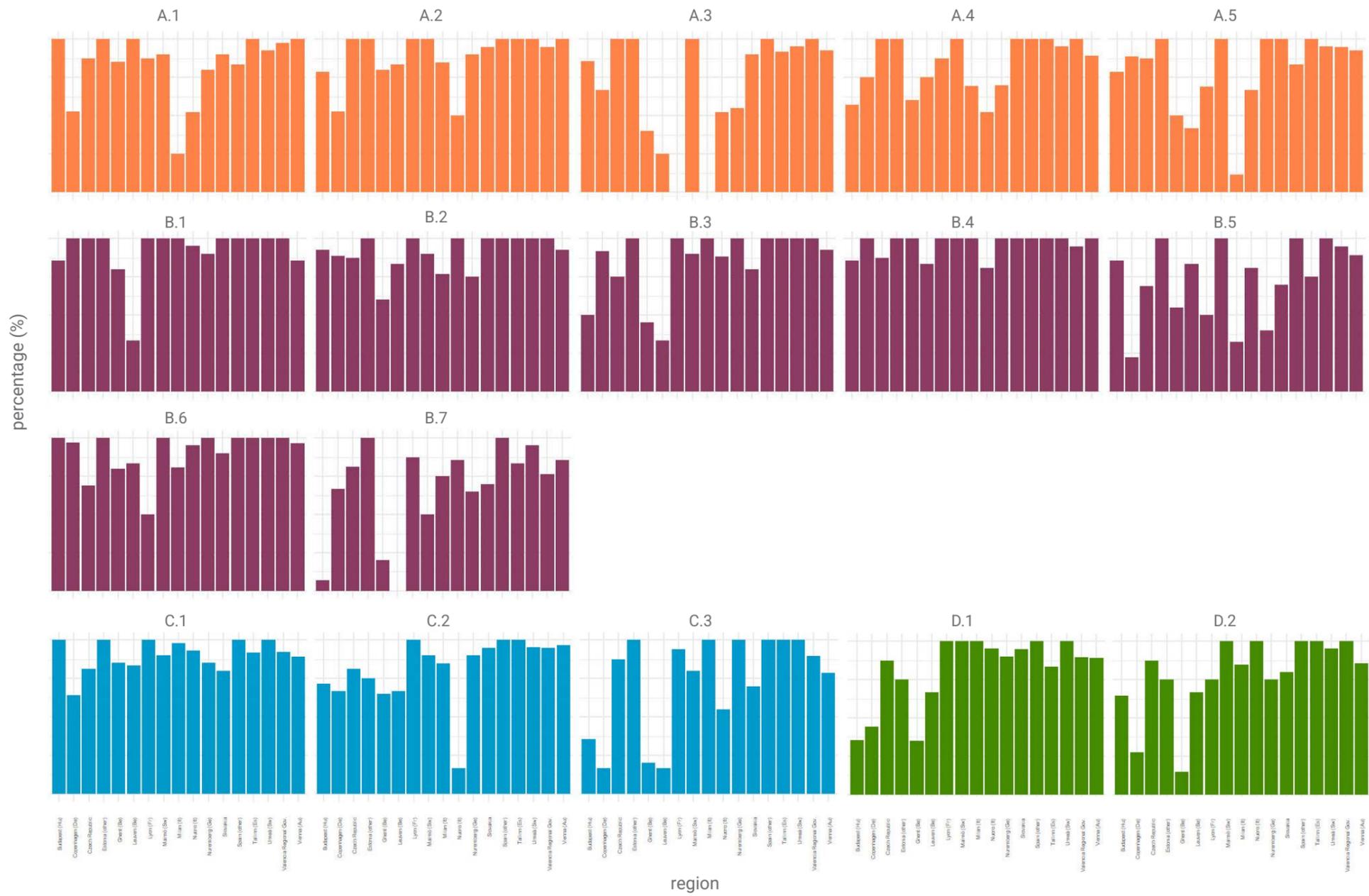
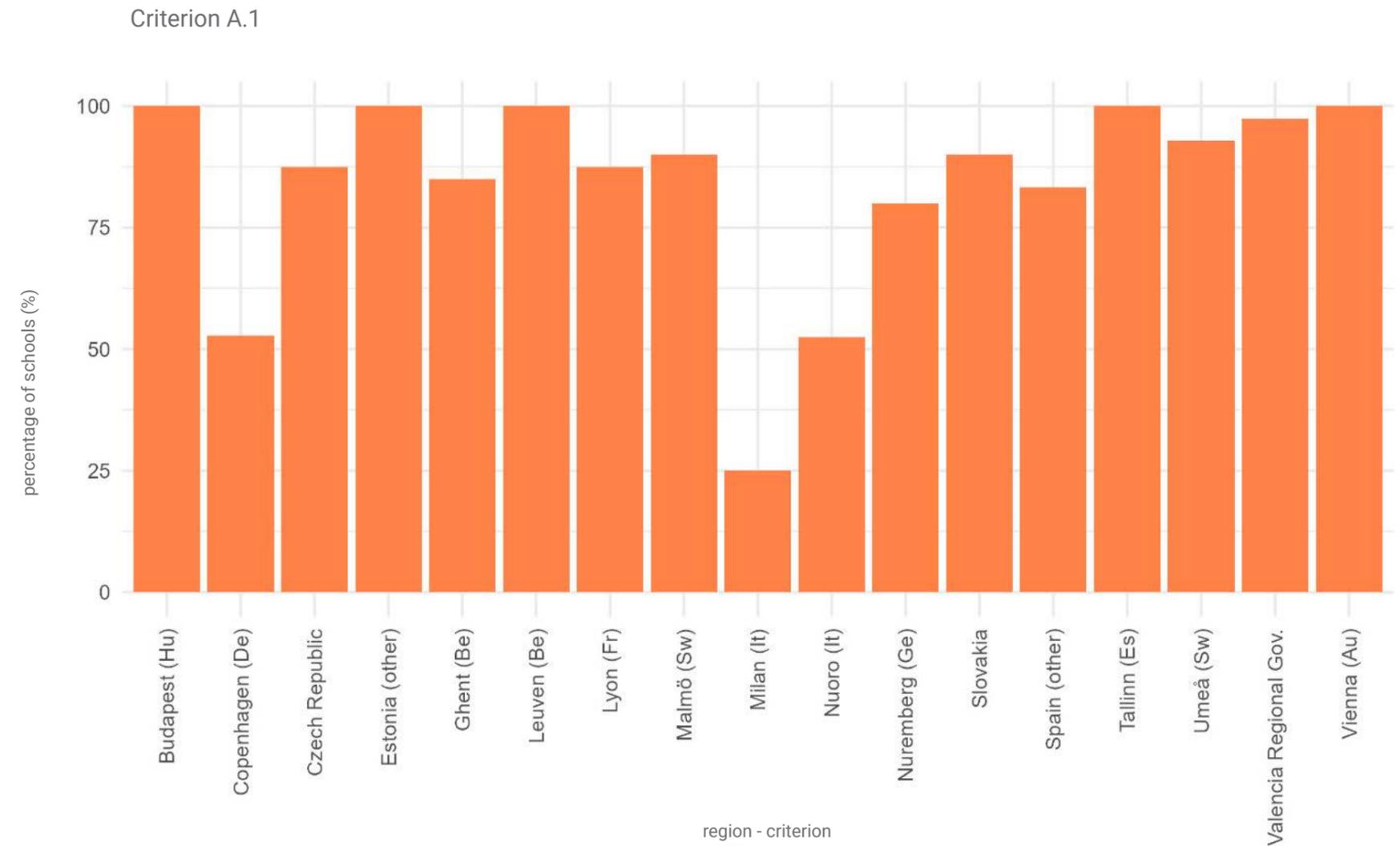


TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

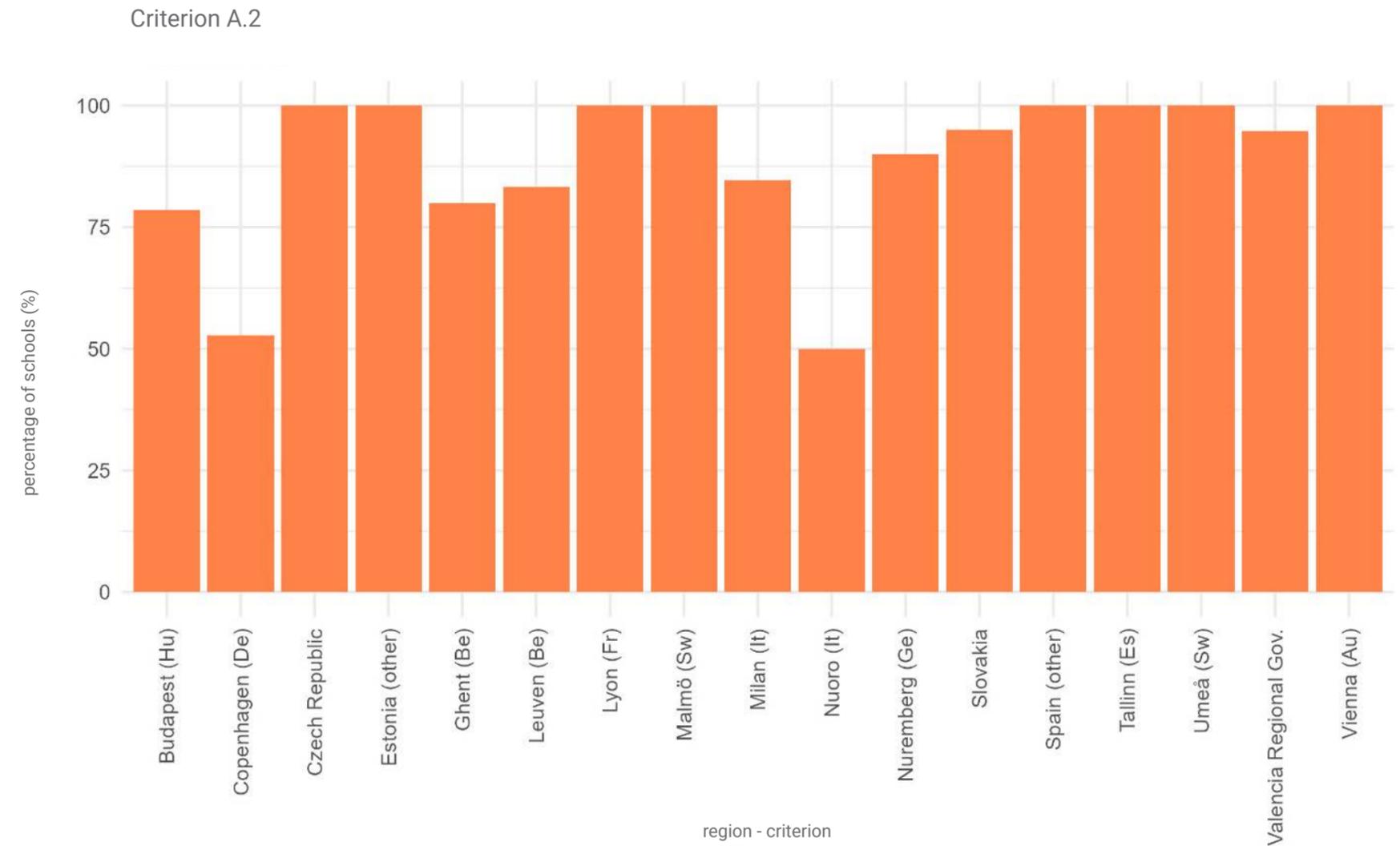


For criterion A.1, Copenhagen, Milan, and Nuoro score significantly lower than the other regions. In Nuoro, all schools except one do not have an internal school-based working group. Instead, in Nuoro, schools participated in an inter-school working group, a municipal school canteen committee, and a 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

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

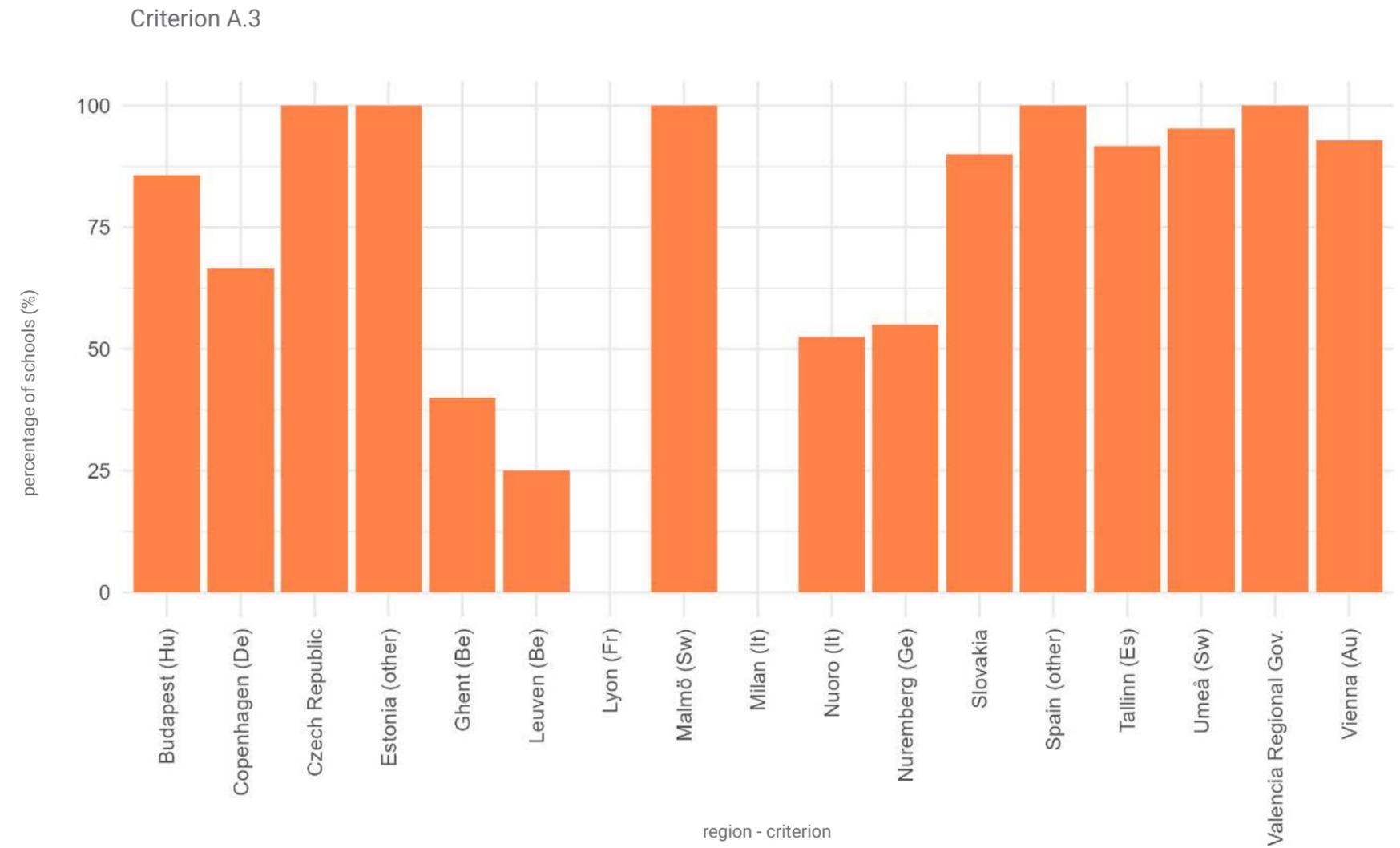


Most schools in Copenhagen selected “other” for this criterion because they have not formulated a separate school food vision, but instead have integrated the city’s food strategy. In Nuoro, achieving this criterion also appears to be weakly encouraged due to the inter-school working group described 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

WSFA Implementation in

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.

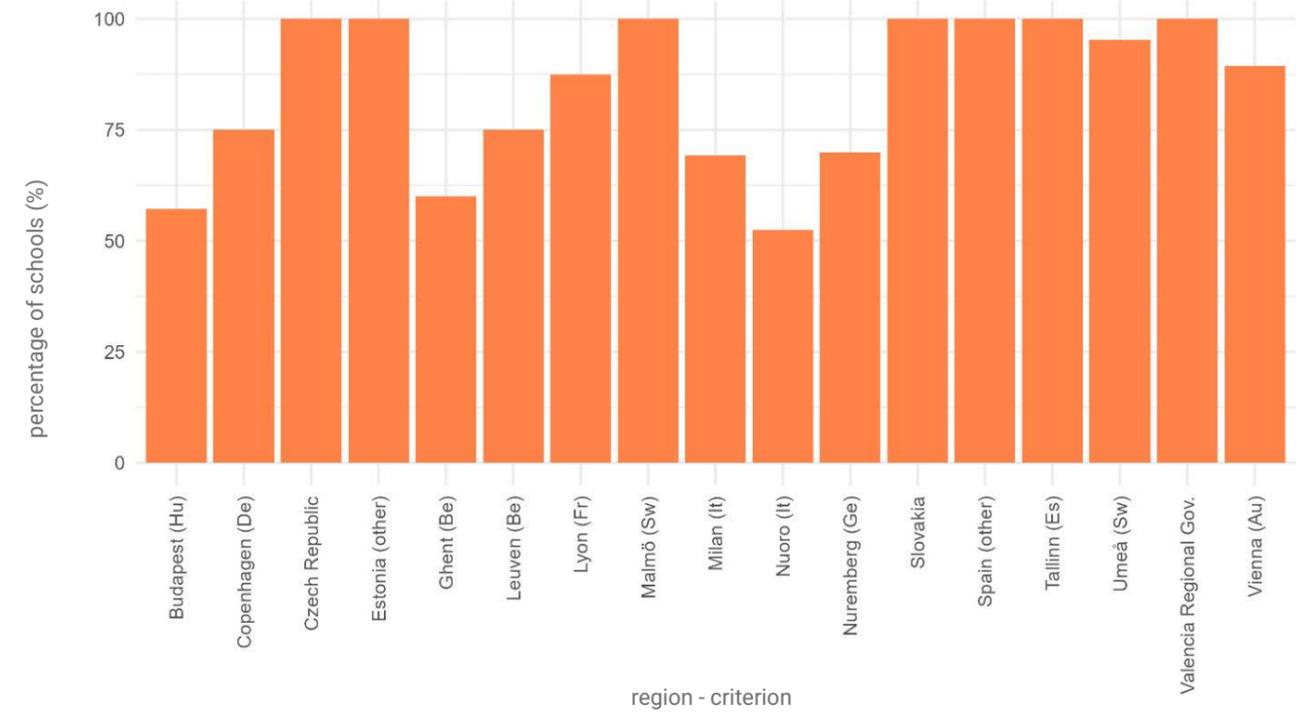
TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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.

Chapter 4

Criterion A.4



Criterion A.5

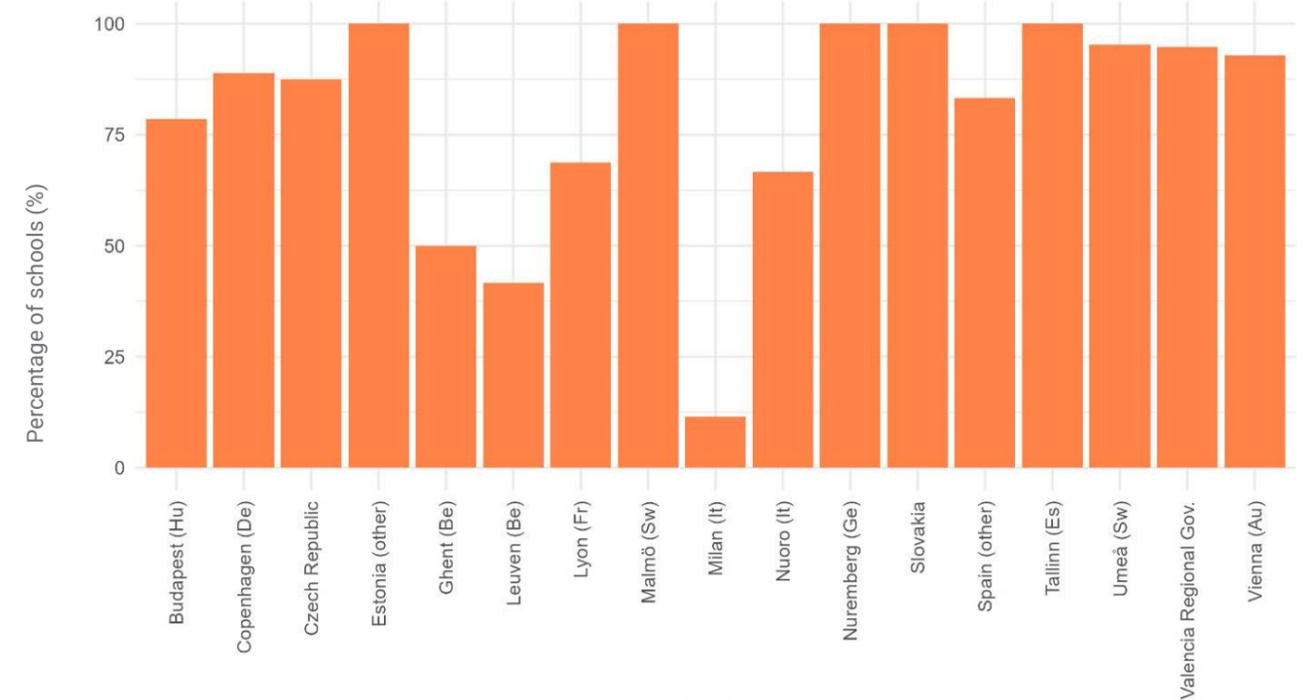


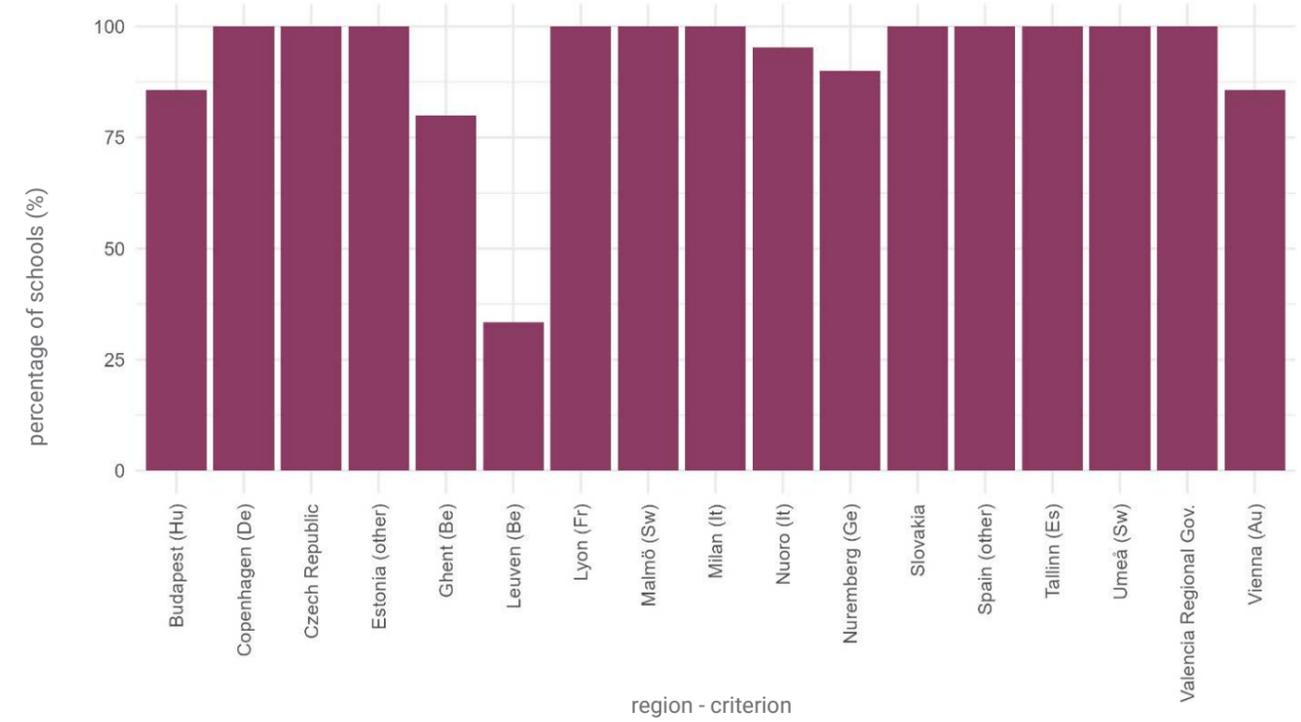
TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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

Chapter 4

Criterion B.1



Criterion B.2

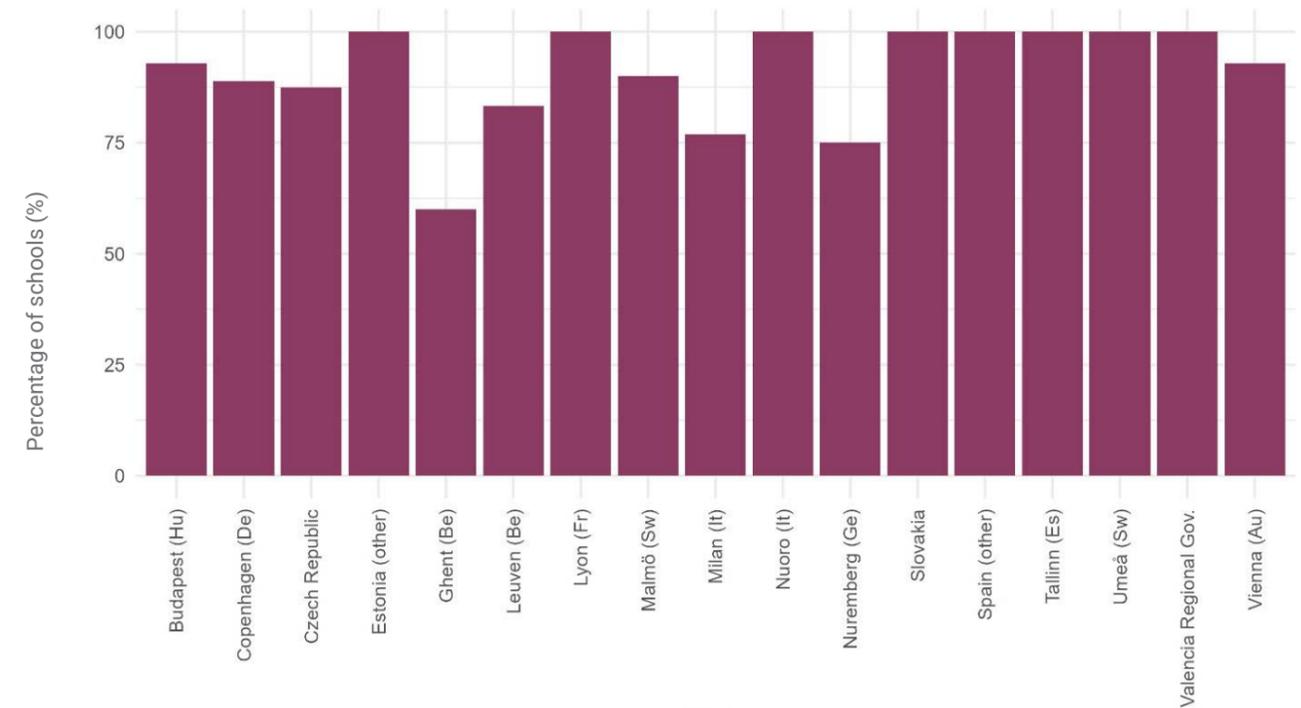
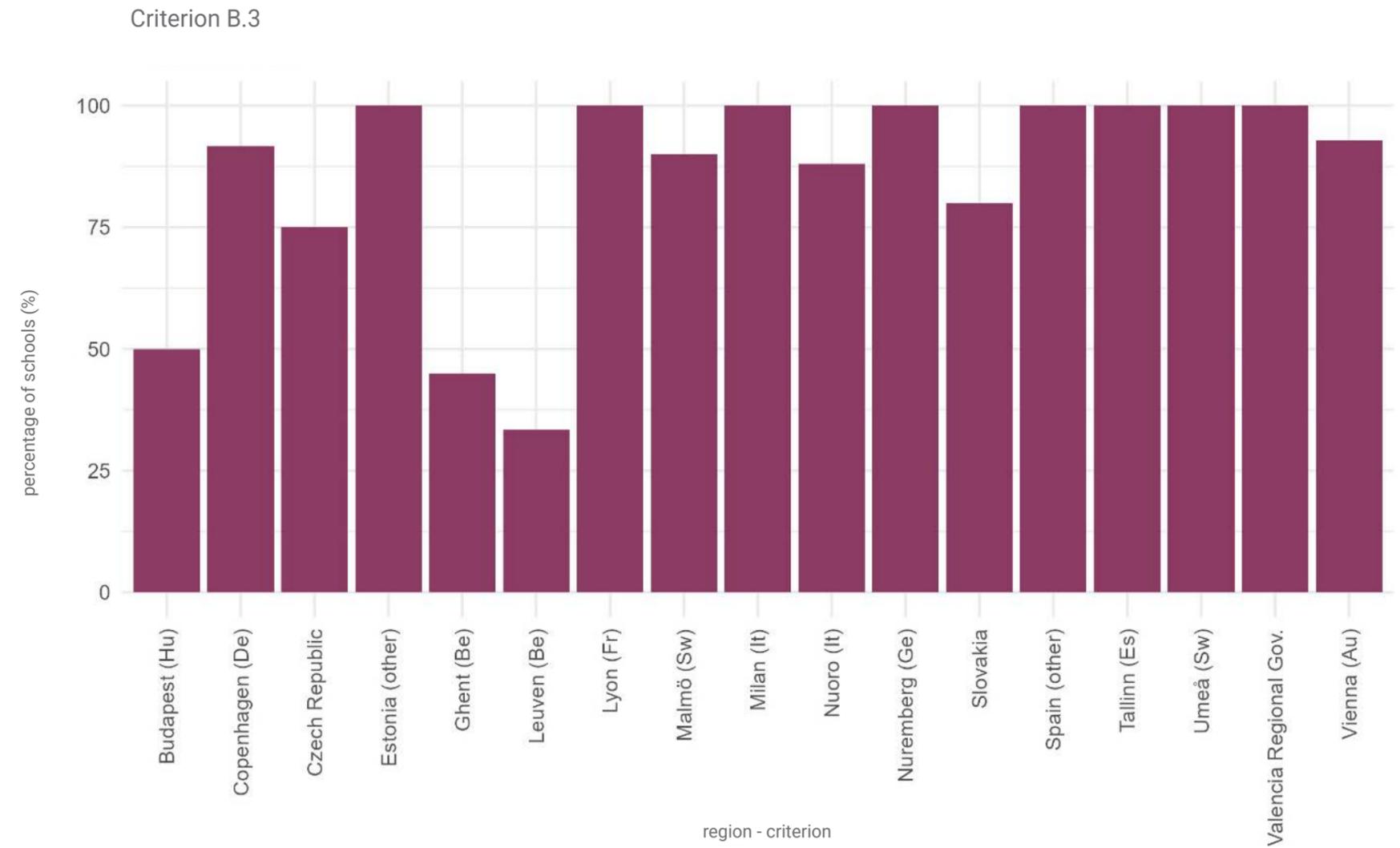


TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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.

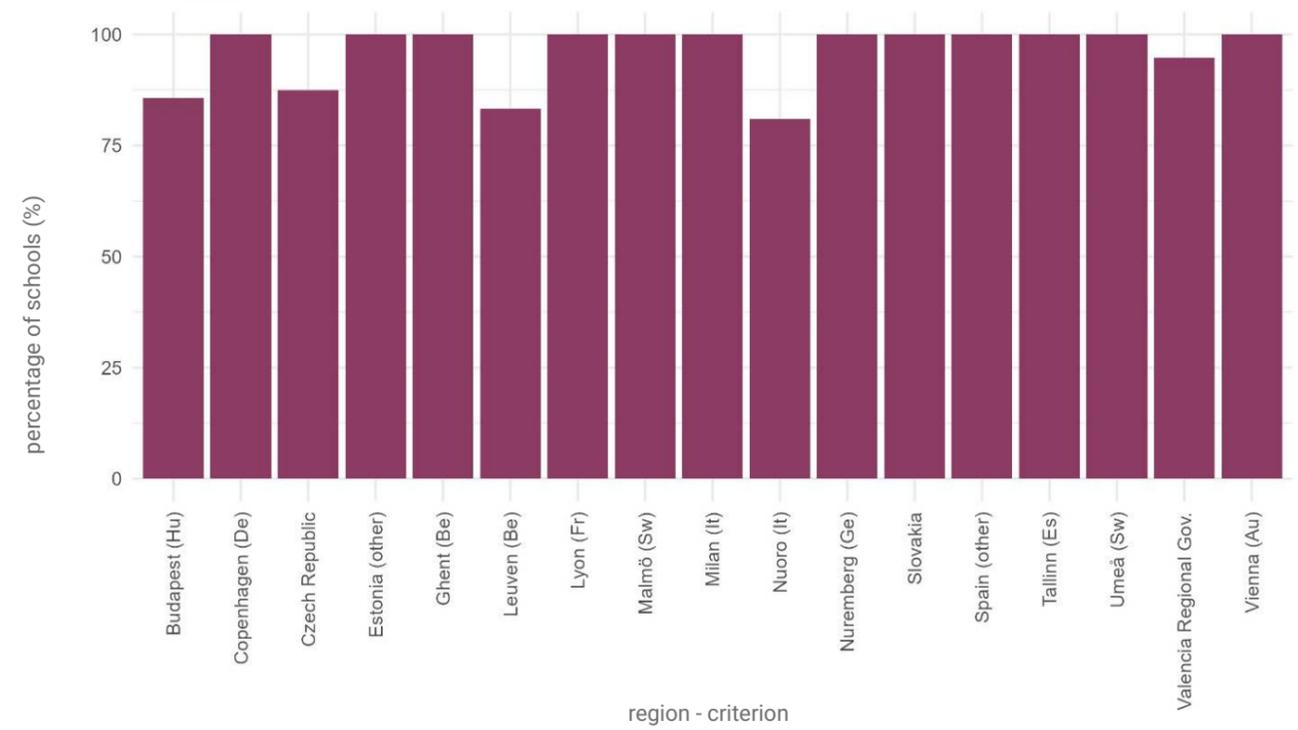
TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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.

Chapter 4

Criterion B.4



Criterion B.5

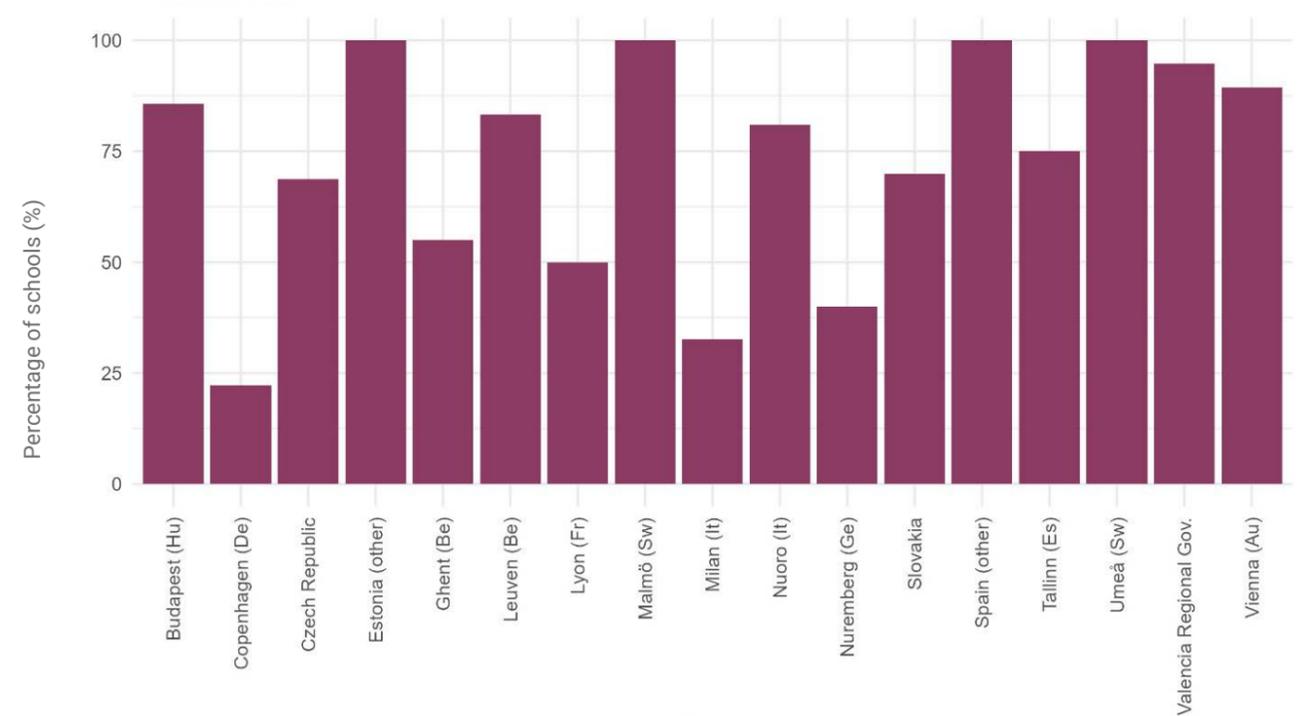
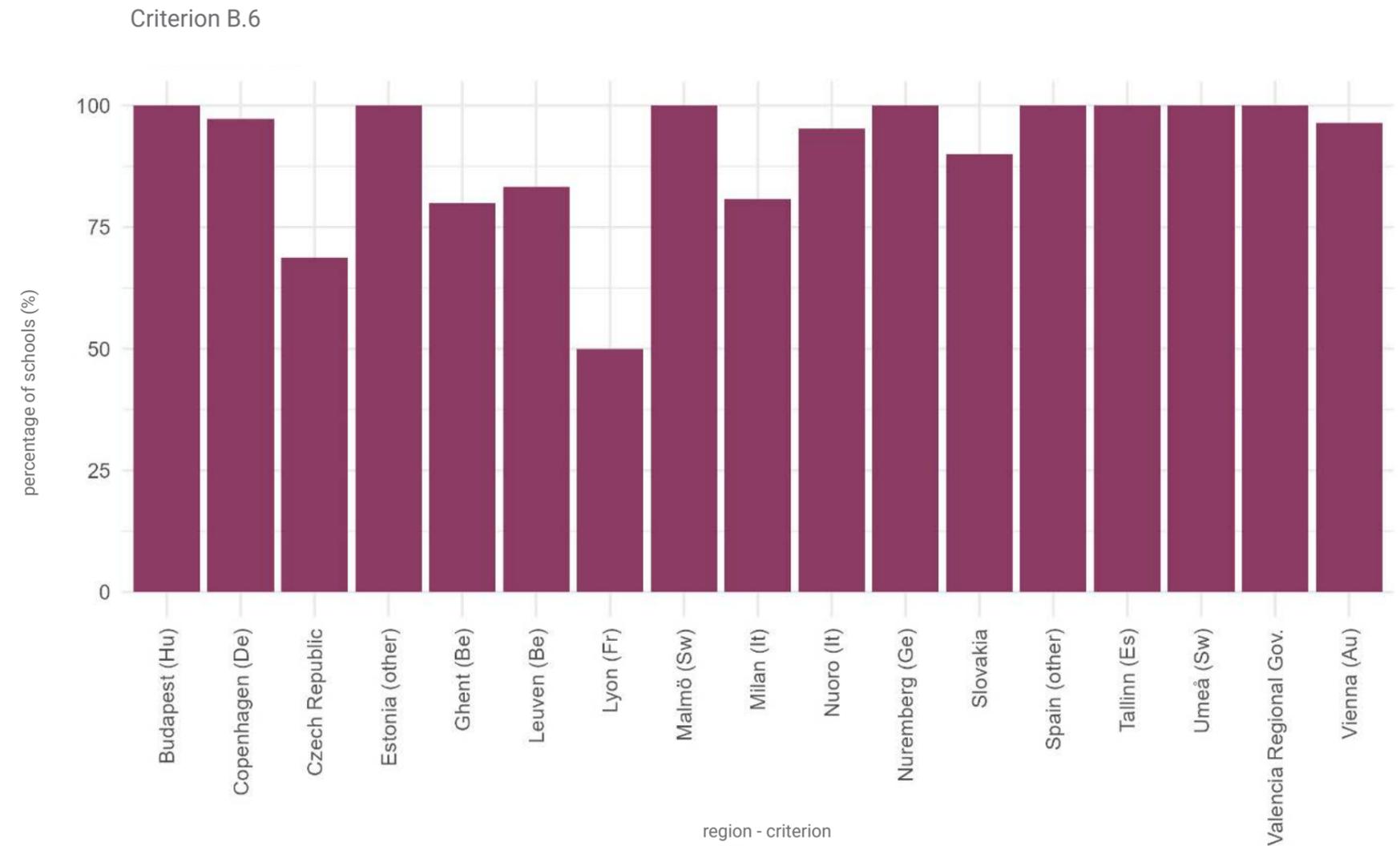


TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4



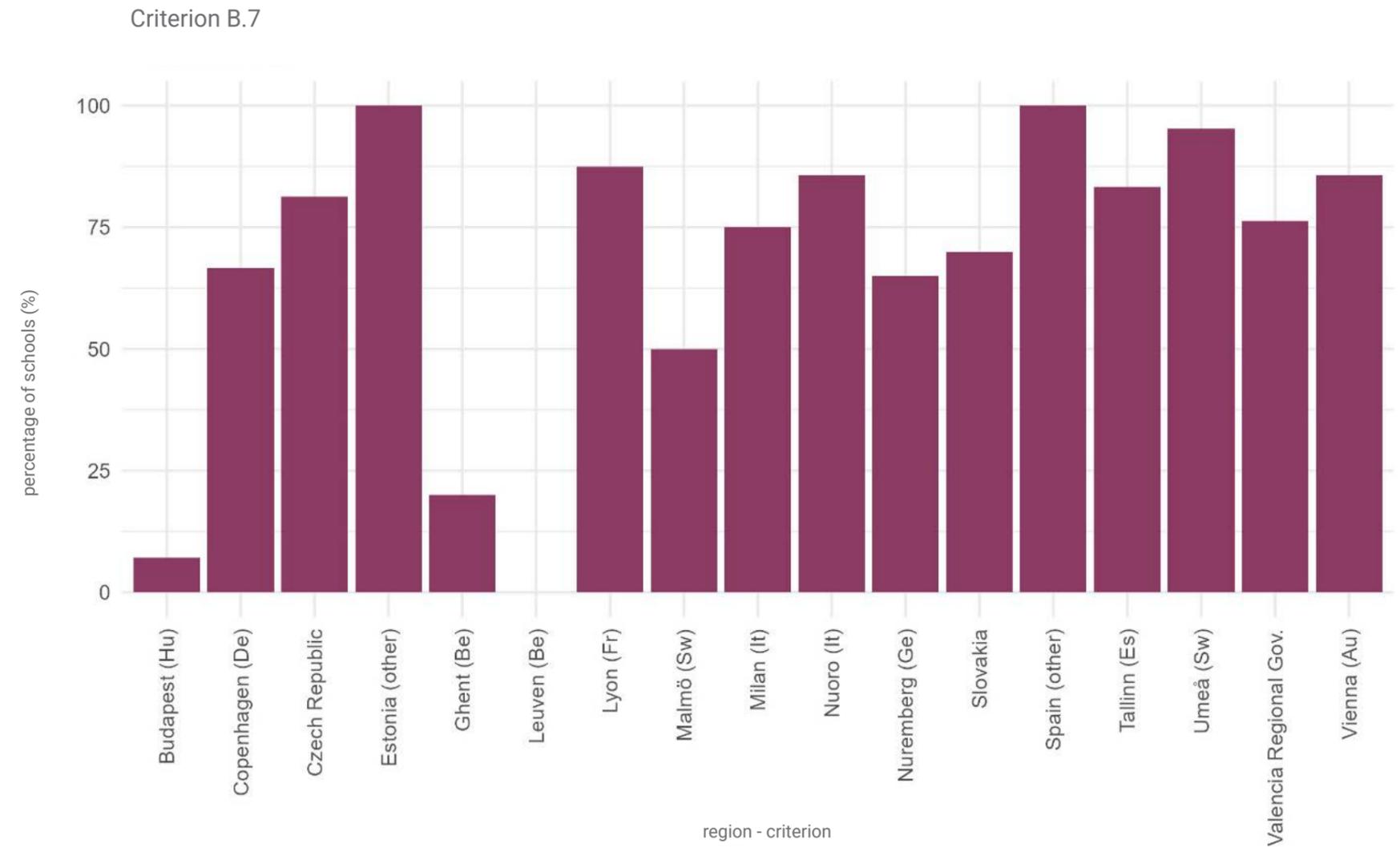
Criterion B.6 specifies that additional provisions are available for students with special dietary needs or requirements. In the figure above, we see very high scores across countries, with half of the regions achieving 100% for B.6.

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.

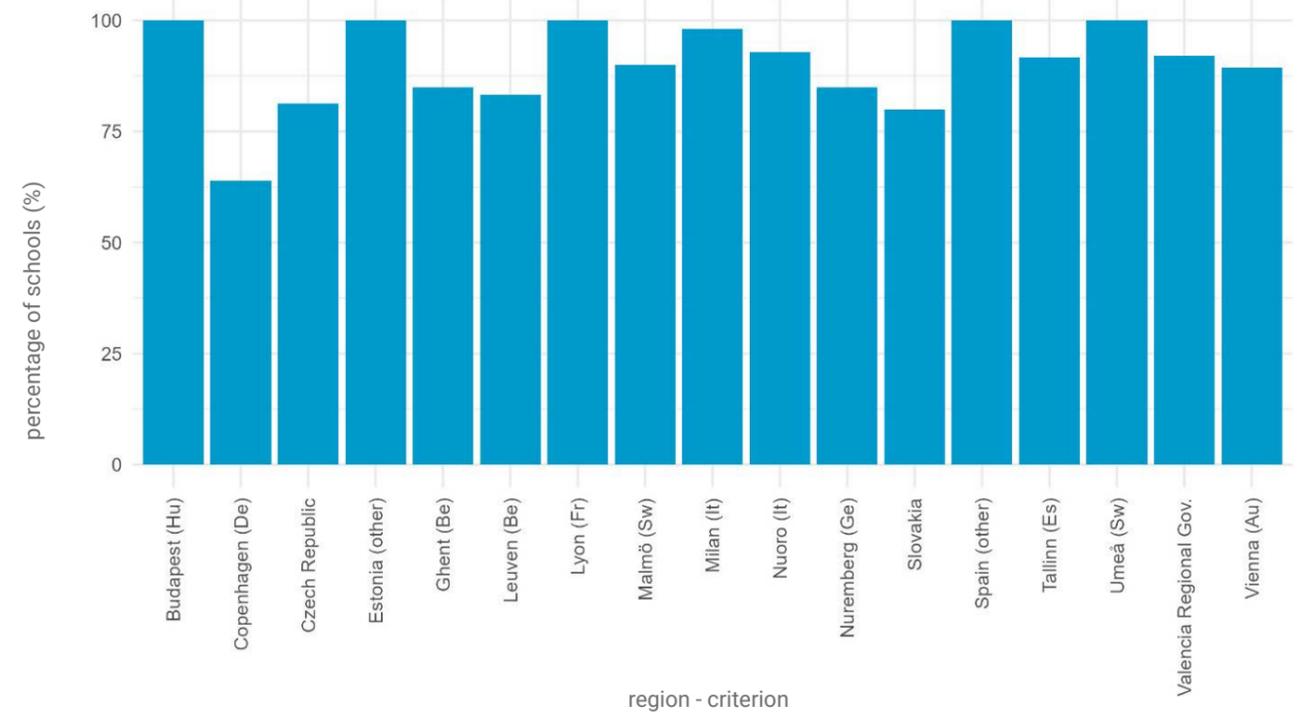
TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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.

Chapter 4

Criterion C.1



Criterion C.2

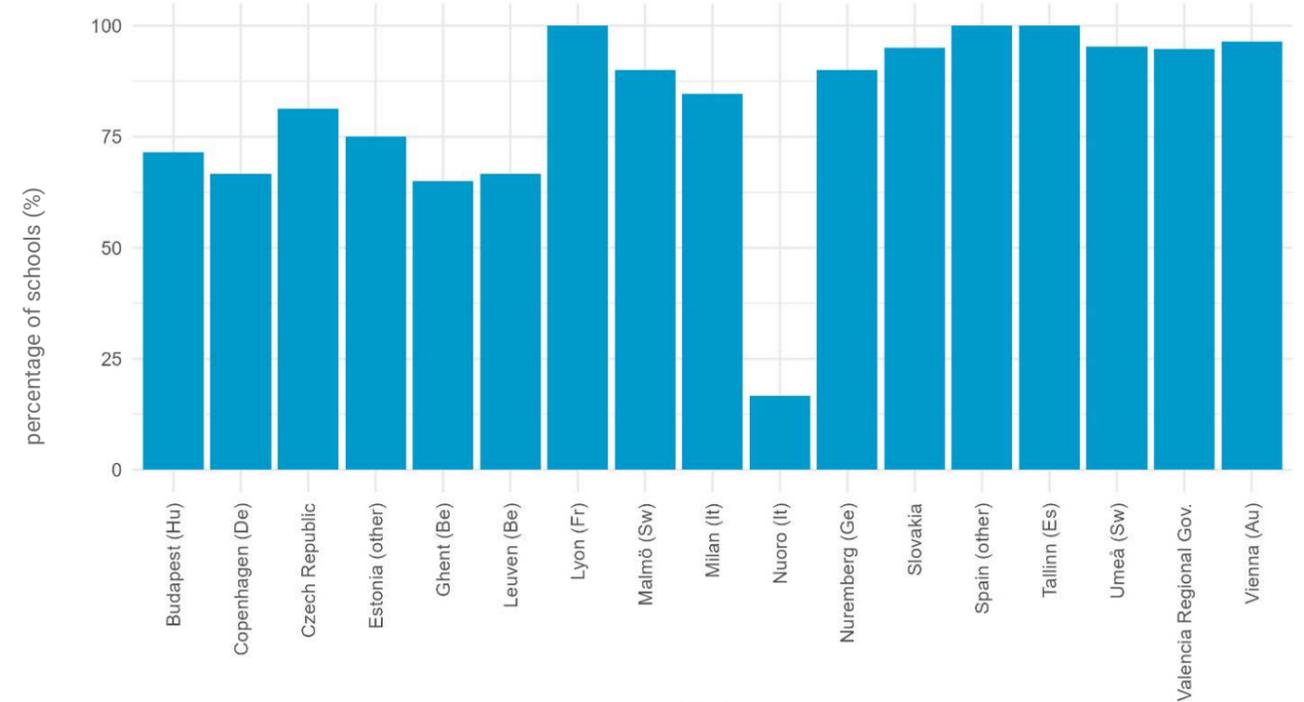
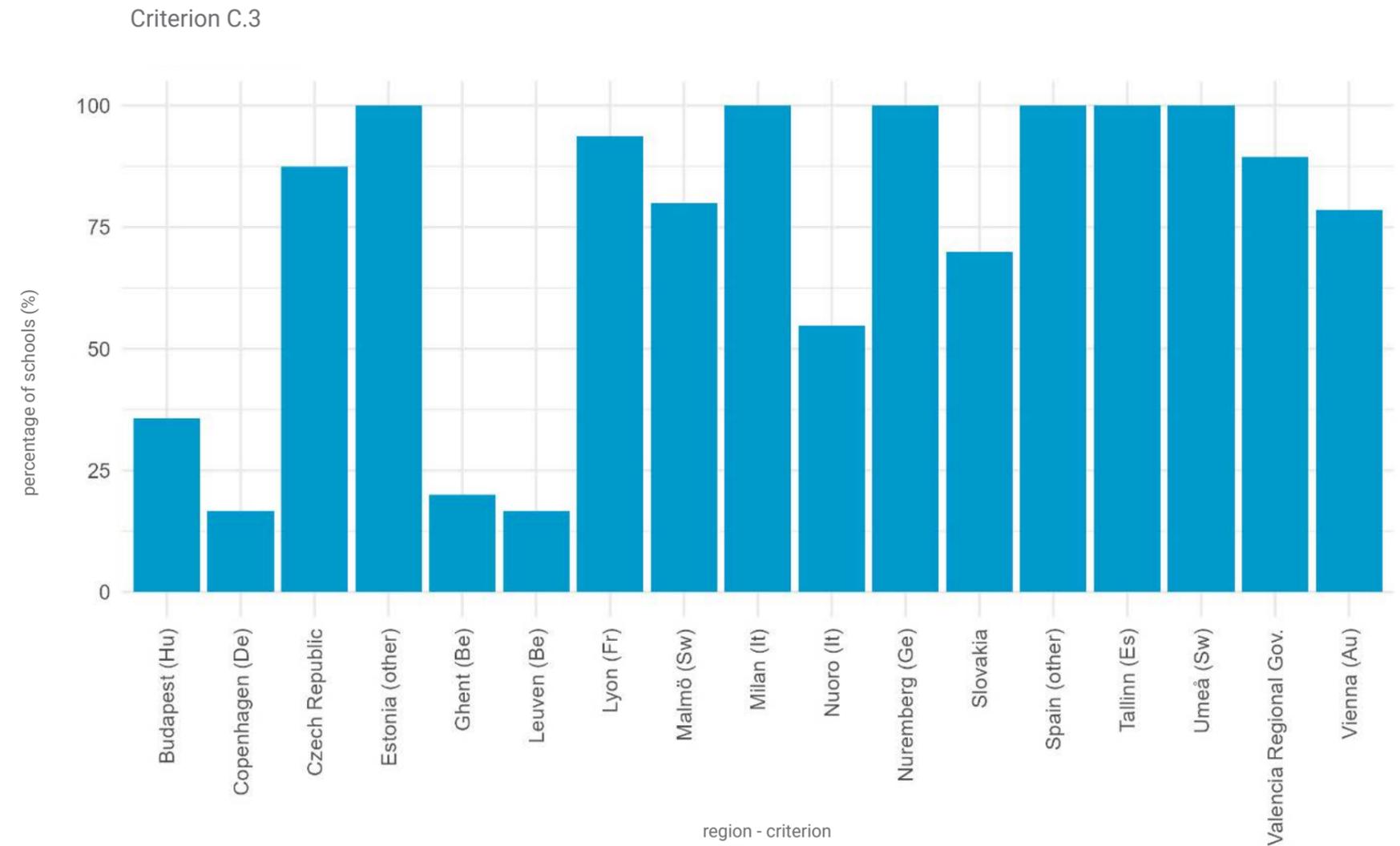


TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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.

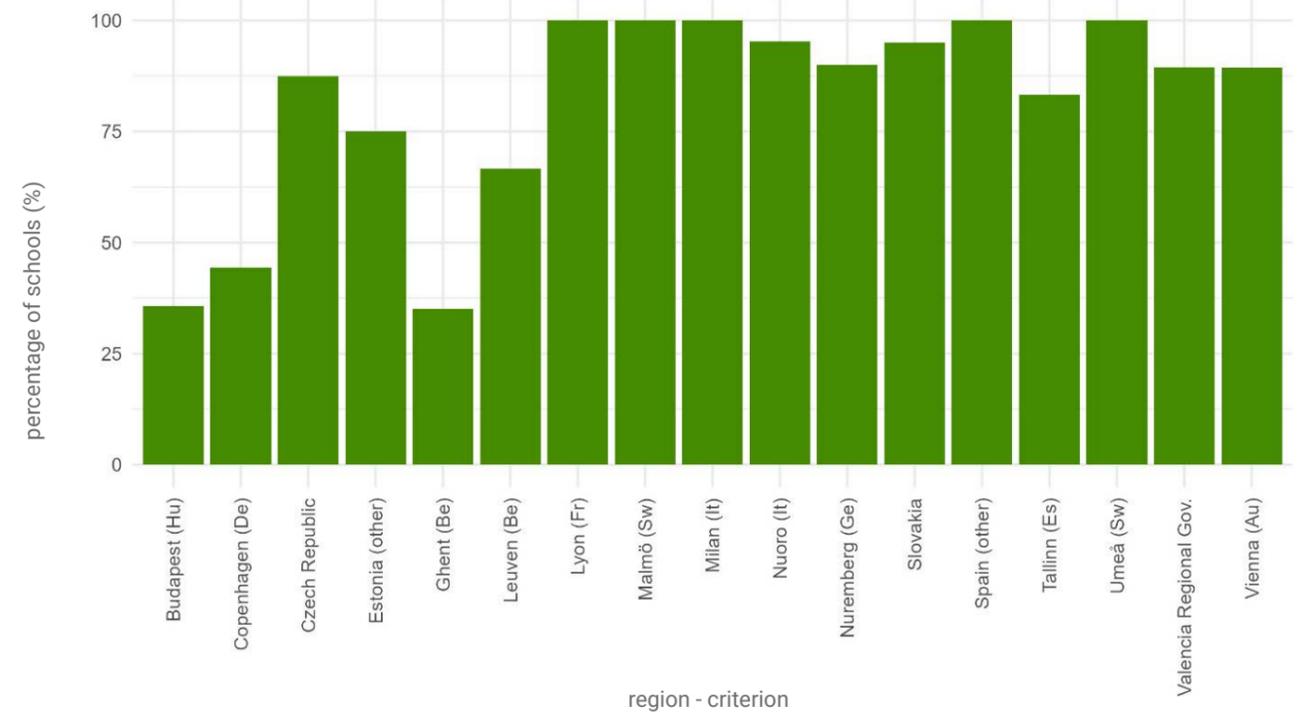
TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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.

Chapter 4

Criterion D.1



Criterion D.2

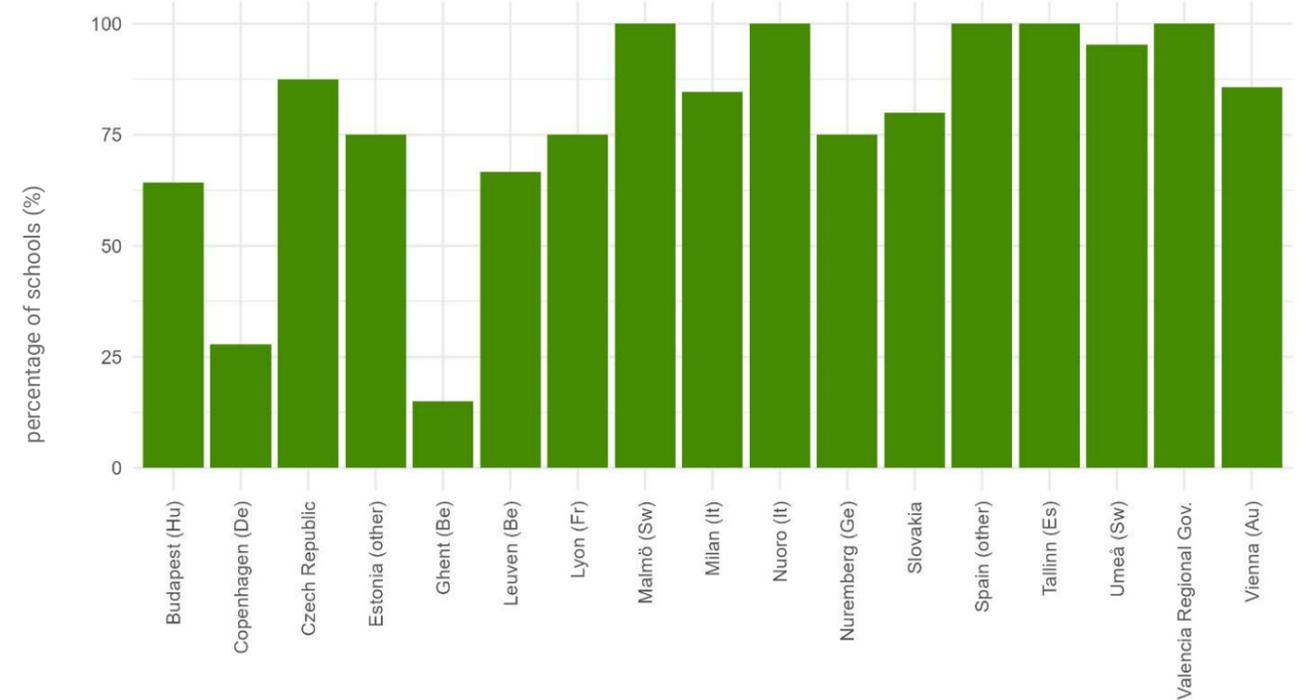


TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

4. Global results: silver and gold level implementation

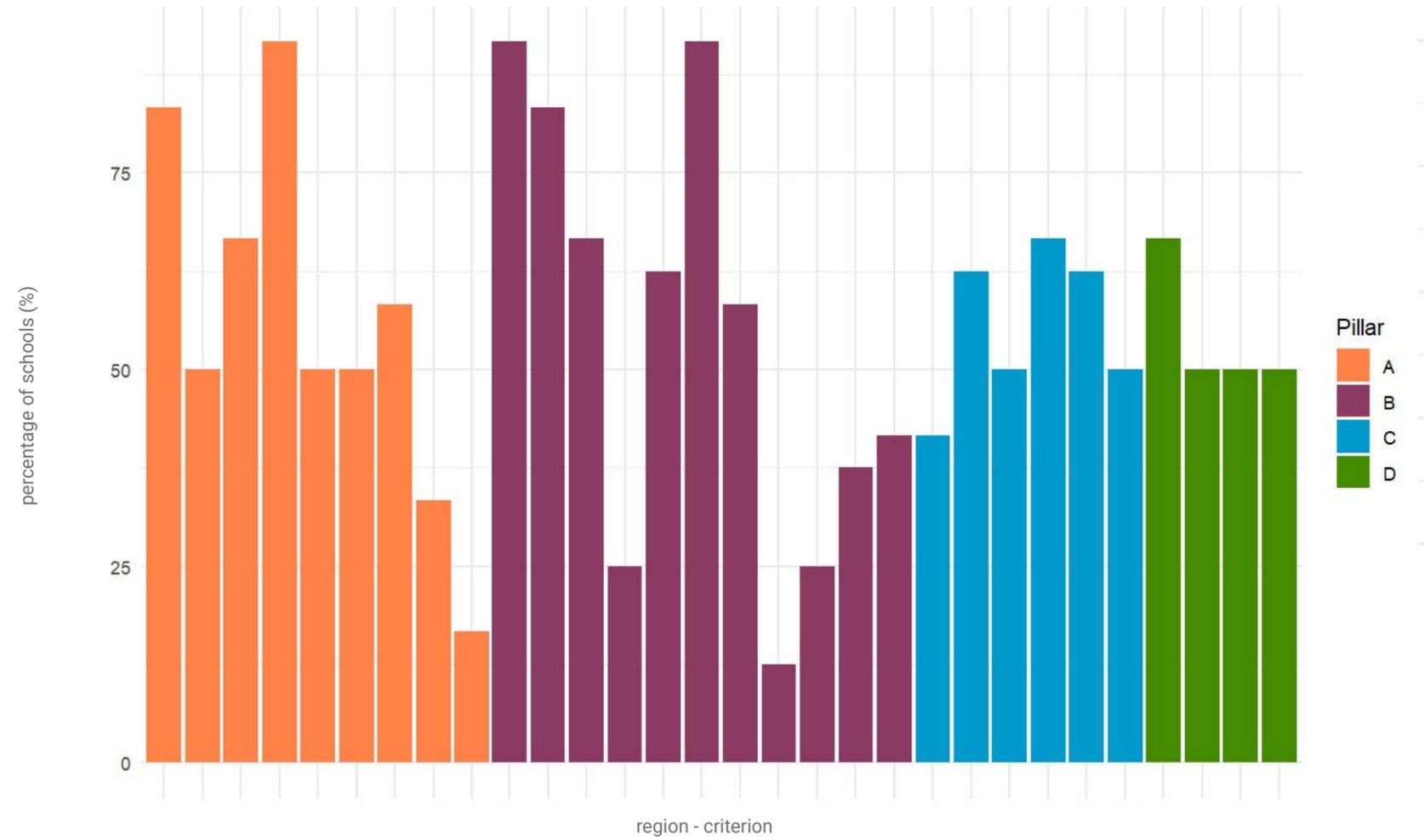


Figure 4: 12 schools filled out the survey for bronze of gold level WSFA implementation.

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

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.

WSFA Implementation in

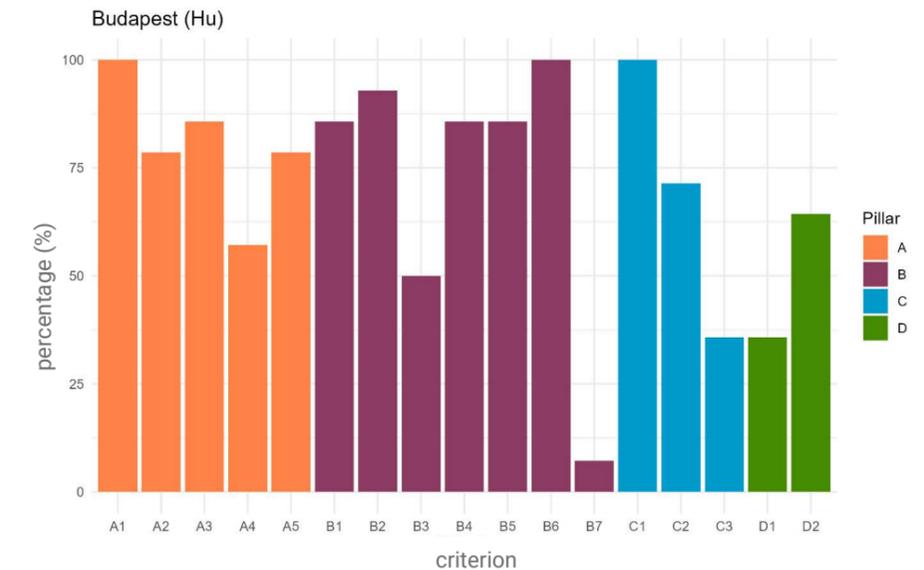
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Budapest, Hungary

Number of schools in the survey: 7

“We revised our school development plan to include goals related to sustainable nutrition and food education. The leadership team actively supports these changes, and relevant actors including teachers, students, and parents have been engaged through workshops, meetings, and collaborative projects. Pupils have participated in food-related activities and nutrition-focused lessons.”

— BGSZC Szent István Technikum és Kollégium



Strengths

- Schools consistently begin with a working group to implement WSFA.
- Existing initiatives are assessed in advance and used to create an action plan.
- Clear guidelines on lunchboxes and snacks.
- Attention to children with specific dietary needs.
- Food is integrated as an educational topic; practical activities such as Farm2School projects and canteen day parties are particularly successful.
- City-organised meetings motivate teachers.
- Schools are experimenting with initiatives such as meatless days and food bank projects.
- Support from the city strengthens networking between schools and provides additional resources.

Weaknesses

- Insufficient focus on staff training and the provision of materials.
- Pillar D remains weak.
- WSFA participation is sometimes perceived as additional bureaucracy.
- Activating schools is difficult due to financial constraints and teacher workload.
- Many schools already work on food sustainability, but often in an unstructured way.
- Involvement of caterers was limited and expectations were not fully met.
- The municipality has no authority to enforce WSFA criteria in schools.
- Attempts to involve the national government received no response.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Most schools already have a clear vision regarding healthy and sustainable food.
- Potential to measure food waste systematically.
- Authentic learning activities (cooking, farm visits) serve as strong motivators.
- Integrating WSFA into existing eco-school or sustainability programmes could support national scaling.
- Municipal support remains crucial for implementation.

Threats

- Communication continues to score weakly.
- National-level engagement is challenging due to governance structures and political differences.
- School food management is fragmented, with no central body overseeing policy.
- Procurement legislation may restrict local purchasing.
- Schools have limited resources and time to implement additional programmes.

Key lessons learned

Practical, hands-on activities such as cooking and farm visits are powerful drivers of engagement. Strong municipal support helps but cannot compensate for limited national involvement and fragmented governance. Schools value clear guidance and resources but are discouraged when WSFA feels bureaucratic and ongoing challenges with communication and difficulties engaging caterers hinder progress. Time and resource constraints further limit implementation and although opportunities for measurement exist, systematic monitoring is still lacking, making it harder to demonstrate impact and guide improvement.

SWOT-analysis per city/region

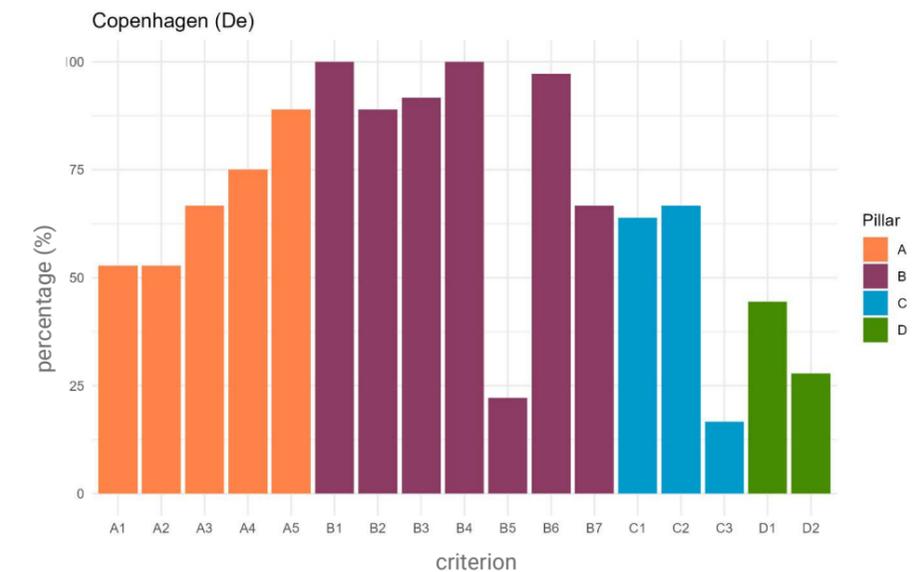
SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Copenhagen, Denmark

Number of schools in the survey: 18

“After a food-waste measurement, the school bought smaller plates which significantly reduced the food-waste”

— Skolen i Sydhavnen.

WSFA Implementation in



Strengths

- The city already focused on school nutrition and the acceptance of WSFA progressed smoothly.
- Copenhagen is a frontrunner in food strategy/policy. The city allocated a large budget for this. Important criteria for school meals had already been integrated into the city's strategy and the cities concept of food schools.
- Network of schools located close to each other: they meet four times a year, focusing on kitchen staff and practical knowledge/experience exchange. Once a year, a network day is organised for all schools (e.g. farm visits).
- Students already involved in the kitchen (A5).

Weaknesses

- Limited reach: not all children are able to participate in the pilot project
- Reorganisation of municipality has weakened connections with schools.
- Schools do not provide clear guidelines for students and caregivers regarding packed lunches and/or healthy snacks (B5).
- Pillar D scores very low.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- A new version of the food strategy is being developed. There is hope that WSFA criteria and pillars will be integrated. This could expand the reach of WSFA to, for example, care centres.
- Schools follow the general municipal food strategy and the shared vision of the City of Copenhagen.
- An annual review of the action plan could help schools maintain oversight and ensure effective achievement of objectives (A3).
- Communication about the school's food approach and WSFA activities (A4) can be strengthened.
- For Pillar C scores are generally below average despite the food schools. However, there also have been experiments with integrating educational objectives through public procurement. The person working on the WSFA implementation at the city level has changed department now and has started working for the procurement department. This makes coordination easier.
- Opportunities for social cohesion through shared mealtimes and parent/community activities. Awareness has been raised about this.

Threats

- Resistance: some teachers and principals would prefer to spend money on books and teaching staff rather than implementing WSFA.
- Dependence on additional municipal budgets for implementation.
- Time pressure and capacity: schools and kitchens have limited time and resources to participate broadly, e.g. in international exchanges.
- Risk that the focus shifts to other priorities after the pilot phase ends.
- Pilot project falls under the Ministry of Education.

Key lessons learned

A key lesson learned is that strong policy anchoring, sustained municipal investment and an existing culture of healthy and sustainable food practices create a fertile foundation for successful implementation of initiatives like the WSFA. Copenhagen's long-standing commitments such as organic catering, chef training, and the Food Schools enabled smooth integration and collaboration across departments. However, limited reach, administrative restructurings, and inconsistent school-level guidelines highlight the need for continuous coordination and communication. Ensuring long-term impact will require embedding WSFA principles into the existing food strategy, strengthening community partnerships, and addressing capacity constraints within schools and kitchens to maintain momentum.

WSFA Implementation in

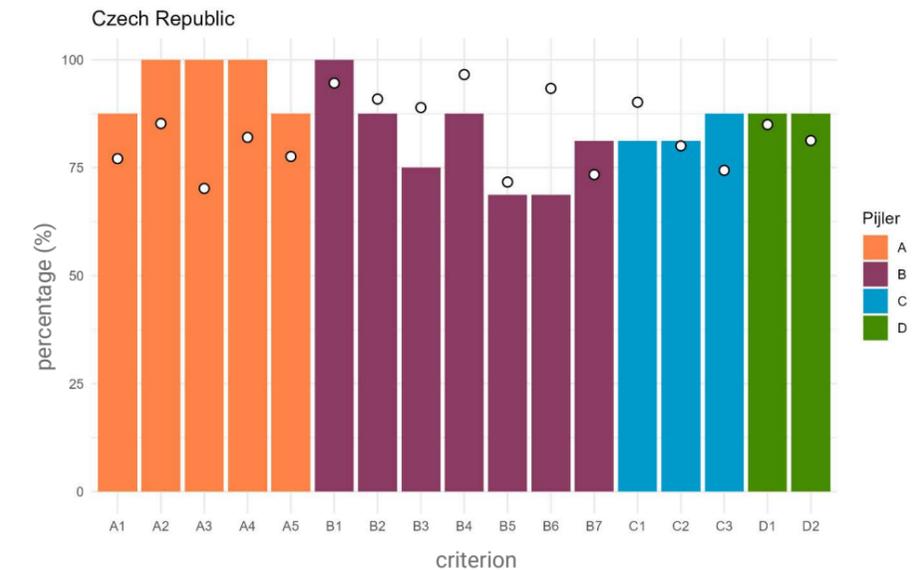
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Czech Republic

Number of schools in the bronze survey: 8

“Thanks to this approach, we have come to realise that food is not only about eating itself, but also about the culture around it. (...) Gradually, we succeeded in creating an environment in which food is seen as a natural part of education, giving children the opportunity to develop healthy habits and a relationship with sustainability.

— Mateřská škola Veltěže.



Strengths

- In most schools, a working group is responsible for food-related activities and the implementation of the WSFA (A.1).
- Development of an action plan and related follow-up and communication runs very well (A.2, A.3, A.4).
- Involvement of students in promoting healthy and sustainable food (A.5).
- Strong focus on a healthy food environment and pleasant dining space (B.1).
- Schools take initiatives to reduce and monitor food waste (B.7).

Weaknesses

- Not all schools provide additional facilities for pupils with different or special dietary needs (B.6).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Encouraging healthy food choices (B.2), and providing transparency and information about menus (B.3) is happening in many schools, but not yet everywhere.
- Not all schools provide access to safe drinking water from taps (B.4).
- Communicating clear guidelines for students and caregivers on healthy lunch boxes and snacks can raise awareness and provide inspiration for healthy, sustainable food (B.5).

Threats

- Follow-up is not linked to the city administration.

Key lessons learned

The Czech Republic experience demonstrates that establishing formal school-level governance structures is critical for the successful implementation of WSFA principles. Schools that created dedicated working groups, action plans, and student involvement mechanisms were able to consistently promote healthy and sustainable food practices, improve dining environments, and monitor food waste effectively. This highlights that internal coordination within schools is a strong enabler of system-level change, even in the absence of comprehensive national policy mandates.

At the same time, the case reveals that gaps in inclusive facilities, teacher engagement, and infrastructure can limit the reach and equity of WSFA initiatives. Without integration into national curricula or broader administrative support, adoption of WSFA practices remains dependent on motivated individuals and isolated school efforts.

SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Dordogne, France

No survey results, SWOT is based on interview with coordinator of School Food 4 Change within the Dordogne region.

Strengths

- Strong administrative and school leadership support.
- High adoption of 100% local, organic, homemade meals (15 certified, 22 more by June).
- Existing resources: trained kitchen staff and continuous peer-to-peer learning opportunities, school infrastructure, rural setting with many local farmers.
- WSFA framework added educational aspects to existing strategy.
- International recognition (Biofach, Food Insider) boosts credibility.
- Successful integration of school gardens, beehives, and biodiversity learning into curriculum.
- Onsite coaching and European project backing increased motivation and legitimacy.
- Ecocert certification is celebrated and valued by schools.

Weaknesses

- Limited teacher participation in WSFA activities and regional gatherings.
- No formalised exchange among teachers as not within the competence of the department.
- National legal framework needed to fully embed WSFA pillars in curriculum.
- Pillar A of WSFA may not align with local policy priorities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Expand educational aspects where possible (farm visits, cooking workshops, food education).
- Use Dordogne-model to inspire and support smaller villages and neighbouring regions.
- Scale up through inter-departmental collaboration (Haute Garonne, Gers, Ille-et-Vilaine).
- Leverage international recognition to gain local support and awareness.
- Potential business model: cooking centralised meals for smaller schools.
- Collaboration with local farmers and logistic platforms (e.g., Manger Bio Perigord).
- Follow-up is not linked to the city administration.

Threats

- Local resistance from farmers and some community members to 100% organic adoption.
- Limited impact on teachers and formal curriculum without national law support.
- Sustainability depends on maintaining administrative priority; future policy shifts could affect momentum.
- Variability in local capacity for sourcing diverse, local products

Key lessons learned

Dordogne demonstrates that strong political commitment combined with operational capacity in school kitchens can accelerate progress far beyond the baseline WSFA criteria. The department's long-standing investments in trained cooks, local supply chains and infrastructure meant that WSFA did not need to build a system from scratch but could instead add educational depth to an already robust meal system. This shows that when local authorities provide coherent leadership, celebrate achievements (e.g., Ecocert), and offer hands-on coaching, schools rapidly adopt sustainable practices.

At the same time, Dordogne illustrates the limits of progress when teacher engagement and curriculum integration remain outside local authority mandates. The main lesson is that operational excellence in meals can only reach its full educational potential when supported by formal mechanisms for teacher participation, either through national curriculum guidance or optional local partnerships.

SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Essen, Germany

No survey results, SWOT is based on interview with coordinator of School Food 4 Change within the city.

Key lessons learned

A key lesson learned is that implementing a Whole School Food Approach requires long-term commitment, clear coordination and realistic expectations from all actors involved. While schools show strong motivation to improve their food environment, they need sufficient time, resources, and support to translate ambition into concrete action. Building trust, reducing administrative burden and fostering collaboration between schools, the city and civil society proved essential to maintaining momentum and ensuring that progress no matter how incremental remains sustainable over time.

Strengths

- Schools consistently start with an internal working group and the integration of WSFA criteria into a school-specific food vision. Action plans are reviewed annually in most schools, with progress evaluated
- Pupils actively contribute to promoting good food practices and measures have been taken to promote healthy, sustainable eating. Parent/caregivers have been involved in numerous occasions.

Opportunities

- First steps have been taken to set up a city wide food strategy.
- A network has been set-up with civil society actors all involved in the Whole School Food implementation process.

Weaknesses

- Many schools approached felt overwhelmed by the list of criteria
- Limited commitment within schools to formally achieve criteria and awards due to perceived administrative "burden."
- Schools stress the importance of 'time' as the most lingering factor for all additional activities that they undertake. A lot of schools struggle with a shortage of teachers and therefore struggle with organisational tasks for the project.

Threats

- It was difficult to secure sufficient time and resources within both the city and schools to implement WSFA. Lowering expectations made participation easier, but this should not lead to lowering long-term ambition.

WSFA Implementation in

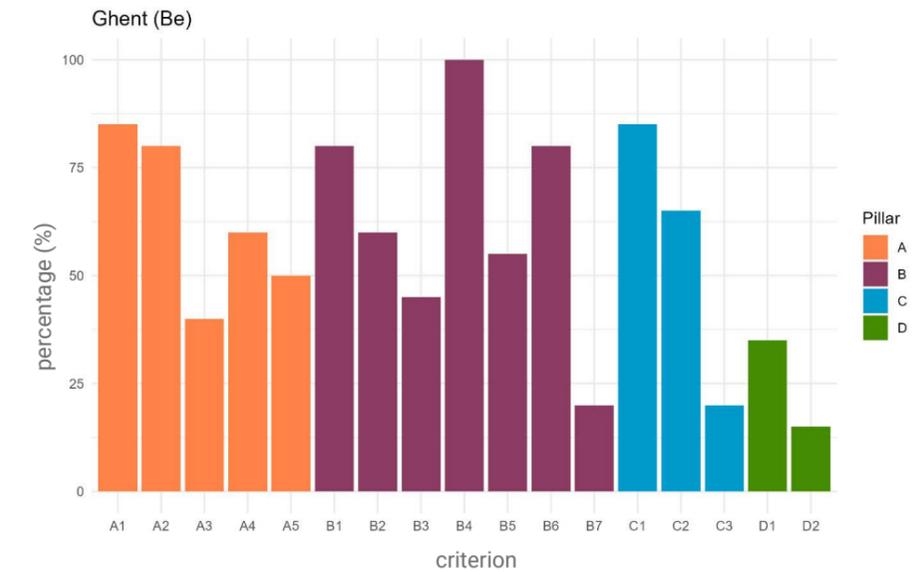
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Ghent, Belgium

Number of Schools in the Survey: 10

“The school has taken several significant steps to establish better policies. All actions – including offering soup from surplus ingredients, planting fruit trees, and providing healthier products in the school shop – have been structurally embedded, which is fantastic!”

—Don Bosco Sint Denijs Westrem, Ghent



Strengths

- Various links between schools and healthy, social, and sustainable nutrition already existed due to the well-supported city food strategy.
- Rikolto acted as a partner (subcontracted) for implementing WSFA in Ghent schools. Leveraging their expertise, methods, and network, Rikolto could provide targeted support.
- Schools have initiated internal working groups on nutrition (A.1), providing a necessary foundation for effective operations.
- Free and accessible drinking water (B.4) is readily available in the city. In the region of Flanders, several initiatives have promoted tap water in schools for many years.

Weaknesses

- Very few schools have conducted annual reviews of their action plans. (A.3)
- In half of the schools, pupils have not yet been actively engaged in promoting healthy and sustainable nutrition. (A.5)
- Schools provide insufficient guidance on healthy lunchboxes or snacks. (B.5)
- Food waste is rarely monitored, and few initiatives exist within schools to reduce it. (B.7)
- Teachers experience not having enough access to thematic workshops on nutrition (C.3)
- Pillar D (Community & Partnership) remains a significant challenge in schools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Interdepartmental collaboration within the city did not have to start from scratch, as cross-departmental nutrition initiatives have been ongoing for years.
- Baseline measurements and the development of action plans generally proceed well in most schools (A.2), but it is important to ensure this occurs in all schools, as it forms the foundation for effective implementation.
- The proportion of schools offering additional facilities for students with special dietary needs remains below average. (B.6)
- Nutrition is integrated into lessons and interdisciplinary projects in many schools. Numerous cultivation, harvesting, and cooking activities are already in place. Greater availability of educational materials and pedagogical support for teachers and kitchen staff could elevate food education and facilitate practical implementation. (C.1 and C.2)

Threats

- WSFA was not part of the municipal food strategy, resulting in largely project-based work. Additionally, the start was delayed due to limited support from local politicians, leaving the criteria weakly embedded in schools and the city.
- A new political majority has decided to dismantle the entire existing food strategy due to budgetary constraints.
- Some schools report having a vision, but it is neither formally documented nor communicated to parents. Without written documentation, the vision risks being lost amid other school priorities, and its implementation depends on the knowledge of a few staff members. Revising the action plan is also rendered almost impossible. (A.3)
- Pupils are still insufficiently encouraged to consume more fruits and vegetables. Many initiatives exist, such as offering fruit as a snack or allowing pupils to sample new vegetables. (B.2)
- Not all schools provide (hot) school meals, limiting influence on the menu and education around lunch. (B.3)

Key lessons learned

The Ghent case illustrates that existing city-level food strategies and strong external partnerships can provide a valuable foundation for WSFA implementation, even when schools face internal capacity constraints. Leveraging municipal support and expertise from partners such as Rikolto enabled schools to initiate working groups, develop action plans, and integrate healthy and sustainable practices into school routines.

However, Ghent also demonstrates that the sustainability of initiatives is highly dependent on political continuity. The decision of the new political majority to cut the entire budget and abandon the city's food strategy shows that even well-structured programmes with strong technical support can collapse if structural backing and long-term commitment are removed. This underscores that project success alone is insufficient and the implementation of WSFA principles in formal policy frameworks is essential to protect gains against political or budgetary shifts.

SWOT-analysis per city/region

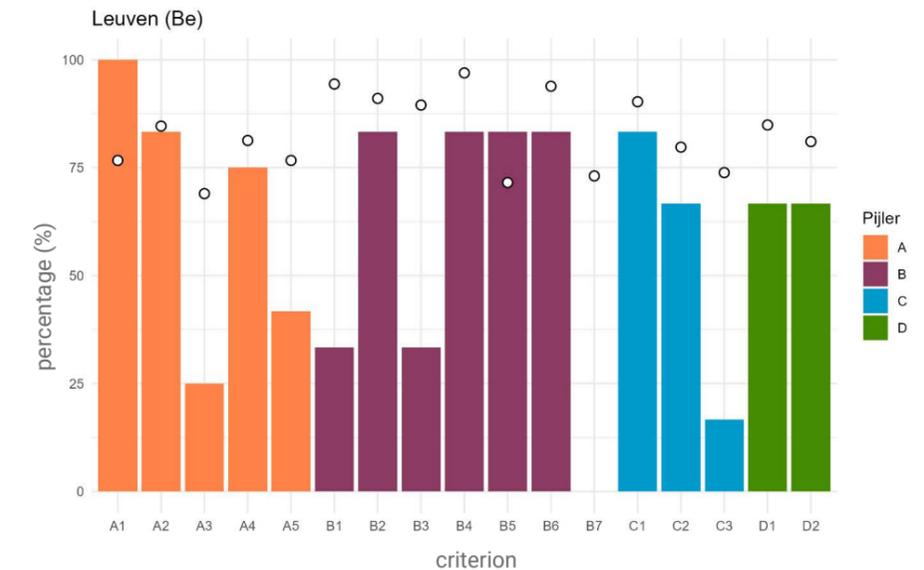
SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Leuven, Belgium

Number of Schools in the Survey: 6

Number of schools participating in WSFA implementation:

"This school has established a working group on healthy nutrition. Their initial plan was to start offering soup at school; however, due to logistical challenges, implementation has not yet been possible. Nevertheless, through the working group, they successfully developed a new policy concerning the bringing of sweets or cake for birthday celebrations. New rules were introduced to encourage pupils and parents to bring healthier treats. A recipe book was compiled for inspiration, and communication posters with these ideas were created."

— Don Bosco Sint Denijs Westrem, Ghent



Strengths

- Every school begins with a clear vision. (A.1)
- Schools more frequently than average provide guidelines for healthy lunchboxes and snacks. (B.5)
- In 2025, the City of Leuven received funding from the Flemish Government, which, in addition to European funding, now provides resources for schools to continue the work started within School Food 4 Change and WSFA implementation.

Weaknesses

- Monitoring and reducing food waste is not currently being addressed, or data are unavailable. (B.7)
- Only a limited number of schools report conducting annual reviews of their action plans. (A.3)
- Pupils are not yet sufficiently involved in activities that promote good food practices. (A.5)
- Low scores were observed for criterion B.1 (providing a healthy and pleasant dining environment that promotes good, sustainable food) which for many schools lies within the competence of the regional government and B.3 (communicating about the menu).
- Teacher training and guidance in food education (criterion C.3) have not yet been prioritised within the schools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Not all schools have yet formalised their food policies within a broader school vision (A.2)
- Communication regarding food initiatives and WSFA integration within schools can still be strengthened (A.4)
- Many schools report actively encouraging pupils to consume more fruit and vegetables (B.2) and to make adjustments for special dietary needs (B.6), although current performance remains below average.
- Nutrition is already integrated into lessons and interdisciplinary projects in many schools. Numerous growing, harvesting, and cooking activities are in place. The availability of additional educational materials and pedagogical support for teachers and kitchen staff could further enhance food education and facilitate practical implementation. (C.1 and C.2)
- School follow-up is perceived by the city administration as highly labour-intensive. By initiating a pool-based approach in which schools are coached collectively rather than individually, the city has found a practical solution.
- The follow-up of the SF4C/WSFA initiative lies within the city administration, ensuring institutional anchoring and facilitating links with other themes, such as mental well-being.

Threats

- Recruiting schools in Leuven willing to participate in the project proved challenging, resulting in a slow start.
- The SF4C project in Leuven faced a difficult launch. Nevertheless, the efforts invested generated enthusiasm, allowing the initiative to gain traction. As a result, many schools remain in the early stages of WSFA implementation.
- Although potable tap water is obligatory in the region Flanders, not all schools report being able to offer it. (B.4)
- Continued initiative and engagement regarding pillar D – interaction with the wider school community – must not be overlooked. Strengthening this dimension is essential for catalysing systemic change and amplifying the overall impact of implemented actions.

Key lessons learned

Leuven demonstrates that institutional anchoring within city administration, combined with targeted support for schools, can enable progress in WSFA implementation even when participation is initially limited. The city's approach: pool-based coaching, centralised follow-up, and administrative oversight allows schools to develop clear policies, introduce healthier practices for lunchboxes and snacks, and integrate nutrition education into lessons and extracurricular activities. Access to Flemish Government funding in 2025 further strengthened these efforts, providing resources to continue and scale early initiatives.

At the same time, Leuven highlights that progress can be constrained by limited teacher engagement, insufficient pupil involvement, and gaps in monitoring and evaluation. Low performance in areas such as food environment quality, menu communication and food waste reduction underscores that structural responsibilities (e.g. regional competencies) must be complemented by active school-level implementation.

WSFA Implementation in

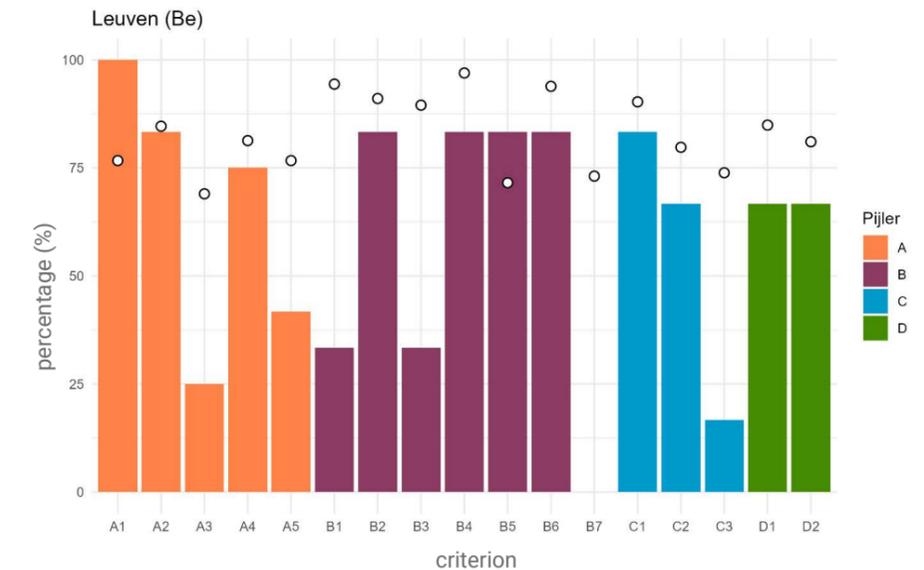
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Lyon, France

Number of Schools in the Survey: 8

“All teams were able to participate in the WSFA project: the principal and teachers, lunch teams, extracurricular teams, and even some parents. The group meetings made it possible to share food-related projects with the entire community and to promote cross-team collaboration. For example, the lunch teams, who are usually not involved during lesson hours, were able to participate in cooking workshops organised by the teachers.”

— Antonin Laborde School, Lyon



Strengths

- WSFA provides a clear framework for school food and sustainability initiatives.
- A clear political will within the city to support food initiatives
- Strengthened collaboration within municipal departments.
- Networking and exchange opportunities for schools are valued.

Weaknesses

- Implementation is inconsistent across schools (some use working groups, others rely on one person).
- Schools often have limited autonomy over food decisions. The city is not responsible for everything which concerns education (pillars C).
- Lack of structured follow-up after events and networking sessions.
- Budget constraints may threaten project continuity.
- National and regional exchanges are underutilised.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Working groups and cross-team collaboration can improve implementation.
- Practical tools and guidelines can simplify adoption for schools.
- Further integration of WSFA into city strategies and tender processes.
- Opportunity to link funding and municipal support to school initiatives.
- Structured school exchanges and regional gatherings provide learning opportunities.
- The city works with very motivated schools.

Threats

- Schools may lose motivation without ongoing support.
- Budget restrictions could halt innovative initiatives.
- Schools' limited policy influence reduces the impact of WSFA.
- Lack of national coordination hinders wider implementation.
- Timing of regional and international meetings may limit effectiveness.
- Complexity of certifications and audits can discourage schools.

Key lessons learned

The Lyon case demonstrates that strong political commitment combined with a clear framework like WSFA can provide essential momentum for school food initiatives, even in complex urban environments. The city's engagement strengthened interdepartmental collaboration, enabled schools to access networking and exchange opportunities, and facilitated integration of WSFA principles into catering tenders and educational components. These factors supported motivated schools in adopting innovative and sustainable practices.

At the same time, Lyon highlights that fragmented implementation, limited school autonomy over educational decisions (national policy), and insufficient structured follow-up can constrain impact. Budget limitations and administrative complexity, including certification procedures, further risk continuity and consistency across schools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

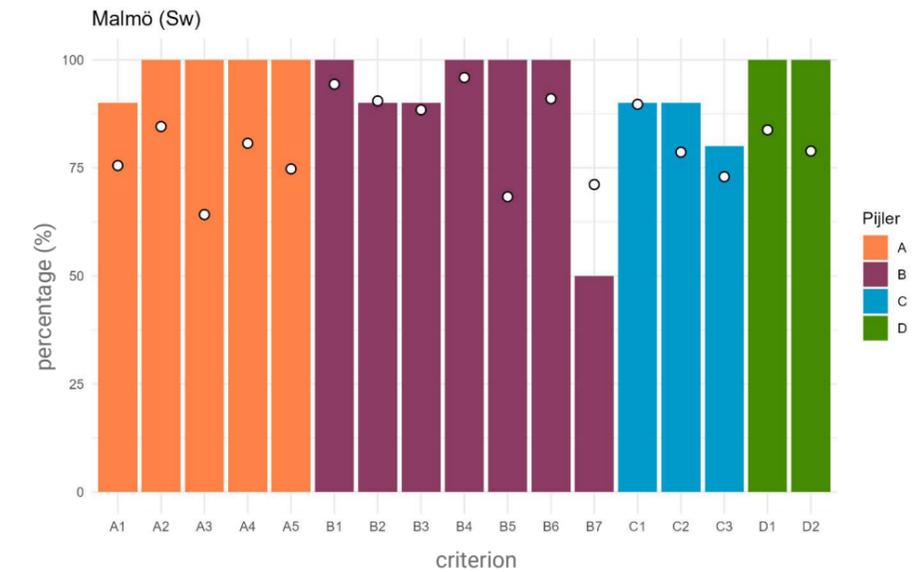
WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Malmö, Sweden

Number of Schools in the Survey: 5



Strengths

- Except for criterion B.7, Malmö shows above average to high scores across pillars A, B, C, and D.
- The framework is holistic and helps structure the work of schools that were already engaged in sustainability.
- WSFA has positive impact on internal collaboration at school level.

Weaknesses

- Criterion B.7 (the school monitors food waste) scores noticeably below average.
- Schools that are not yet engaged in sustainability find the framework intimidating.
- The high workload in schools means that WSFA does not always become a top priority.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- For the City of Malmö, implementing pillar C (education and learning) was the least familiar area, and there is still room for improvement.

Threats

- Risk of schools dropping out without continued support.
- Strong dependence on resources and technical support for further implementation.
- It was noted that recruiting the fifteen test schools was difficult, and the process of convincing a school and getting started is experienced as very intensive. This limits scalability.

Key lessons learned

Even in a pioneering city like Malmö, long-term success of the Whole School Food Approach depends on sustained support, clear structures, and manageable entry points for schools. While the holistic framework strengthens collaboration and builds on existing sustainability work, schools require practical tools, reduced complexity, and reliable resources to maintain motivation, especially given high workloads and limited time. Strengthening food-waste monitoring, expanding educational activities, and ensuring stable institutional and financial anchoring are essential to help schools remain engaged and to make broader scaling feasible.

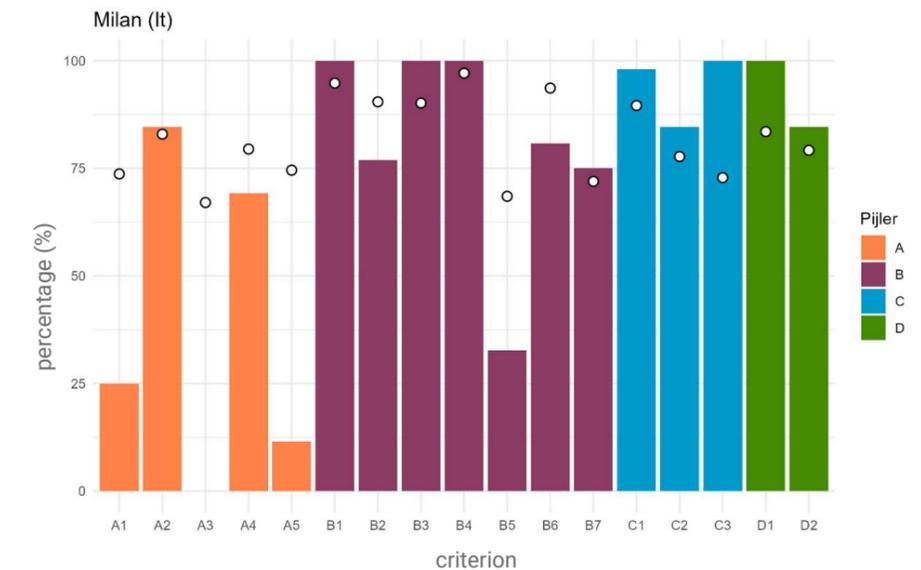
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Milan, Italy

Number of Schools in the Survey: 26

“The project has increased the interest of teaching staff as well as the opportunities to involve children through laboratory activities with educational gardens, equipment, eating fruit mid-morning, and visits to the kitchen. These activities motivated both teachers and children to make drawings and ask questions to the cooks. In addition, visits to Cascina were organised to learn about the value of food in the region.”

– Cristina Sossan, staff member, City of Milan



Strengths

- Strong local food culture and production. This also explains the good scores in Pillar B. Even before School Food 4 Change, schools already had a solid food offering.
- Above-average/high scores in Pillar C (Education). In recent years, strong investments have been made in this pillar through teacher training and by involving the caterer Milano Ristorazione in pupils' food education.
- Above-average/high scores in Pillar D (Parental and community involvement).

Weaknesses

- Criterion B.5 (Facilities for special meals) scores low/below average.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Milan's strong performance in food education offers momentum to involve students in shaping a school food vision, connecting experiential learning (Pillar C) with governance (Pillar A) and strengthening ownership.

Threats

- Pillar A (Policy and leadership) scores relatively lower. This reflects Milan's deliberate choice not to overburden schools and to respect their policy autonomy. With the continued focus on school food, however, this remains a valid and sustainable approach.
- Uncertainty around institutional support. A dedicated staff member has been appointed within the city administration for School Food 4 Change, but it is unclear whether this role can be maintained after the project ends.
- Dependence on additional funding for implementation.

Key lessons learned

The Milan case demonstrates that a deeply rooted food culture, strong pedagogical investments and effective partnerships can drive significant progress in school food transformation, even in the absence of a highly formalised governance structure at school level. Milan shows how experiential food education can meaningfully engage teachers and pupils, creating a fertile environment for WSFA implementation.

The city's deliberate respect for school autonomy limits the development of school-level food visions and contributes to lower scores in Pillar A. While this governance model avoids overburdening schools, it also exposes the system to risk the moment the city decides to pull out.

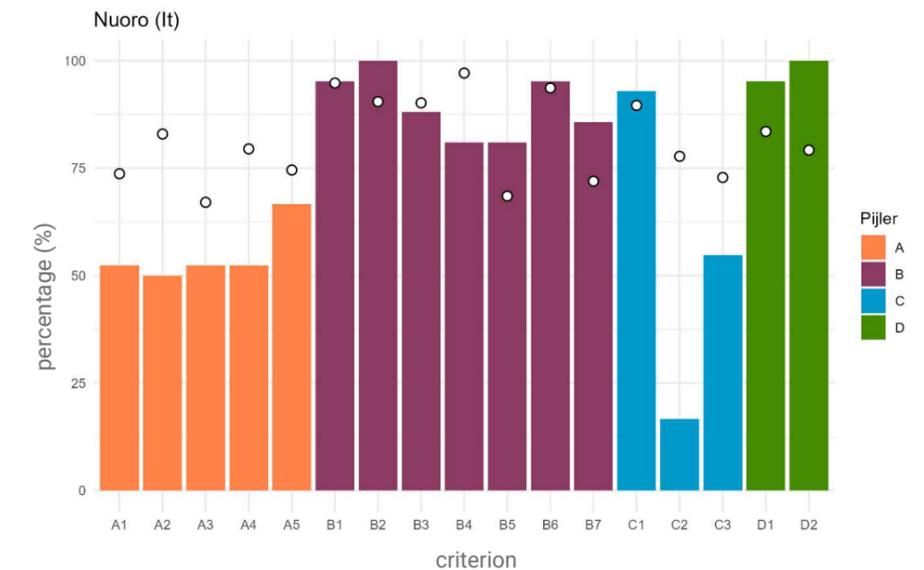
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Nuoro, Italy

Number of Schools in the Survey: 21

"During the 2023-2024 school year, the school participated in the Ci.Buo educational programme by activating module 4, dedicated to the aromatic herbs of Sardinia. In addition, during the current school year, the school activated module 3 on legumes, both facilitated by Slow Food. Both workshops contributed to improving the food culture at school, both for the children and their families and teachers. The teachers gained access to a training module that provided them with useful teaching resources for the future."

— Scuola dell'infanzia San Pietro



Strengths

- Strong local food culture and production. This also explains the good scores in pillar B. School Food 4 Change also had a solid food offering at school.
- Network of schools: schools meet regularly as part of the project, focusing on the practical exchange of knowledge/experiences.
- Above-average/high scores in pillar D: involvement of parents and the community.
- Ci.Buo programme developed by the school working group. The programme consists of 12 modules for primary school children to learn about school food from different perspectives.
- Strong support from Ecosistemi, the National Lead Partner.

Weaknesses

- Geographical location on an island, which means that, in addition to local production, the area is dependent on food being transported by ship or air.
- The C.2 score is well below average. This contradicts the many good examples we received from Nuoro in which food was integrated into lessons and interdisciplinary projects.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Schools in Nuoro generally score below average on pillar A (policy and leadership). This is because the city administration decided to set up a single working group for all schools. This means that a single vision and action plan is developed for all schools in Nuoro. As long as someone within the city administration is working on the theme, this can be a valid organisational structure, but once the resources run out, there is a high risk that everything will come to a halt. Throughout the project, less emphasis has been placed on pillar A, Policy & Leadership. Criteria A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5 therefore score below average, which means there is a real risk that activities will come to a standstill after the end of School Food 4 Change.
- Despite the strong Ci.Buo programme, the score is below average on pillar c (Education and Learning).
- Parental involvement (pillar D): high parental participation

Threats

- A person has been appointed within the city administration in the context of School Food 4 Change, but the employee within the administration estimates that the chance of someone continuing to work for the city of Nuoro afterwards is small.
- Dependence on additional resources for implementation. Risk that focus will shift to other priorities after the pilot phase

Key lessons learned

Nuoro's experience highlights the importance of building on a strong local food culture and active school networks, as exemplified by the Ci.Buo programme and high parental engagement. While practical food activities and community involvement were successful, the project revealed challenges in embedding policy and leadership structures, particularly when a single working group serves all schools. Sustainable impact requires institutional anchoring, continuous resources and clear

strategies to integrate food education into the curriculum. Early successes in hands-on activities must be complemented by structural support, formalised vision, and long-term planning to prevent progress from stalling once project resources or personnel are no longer available.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

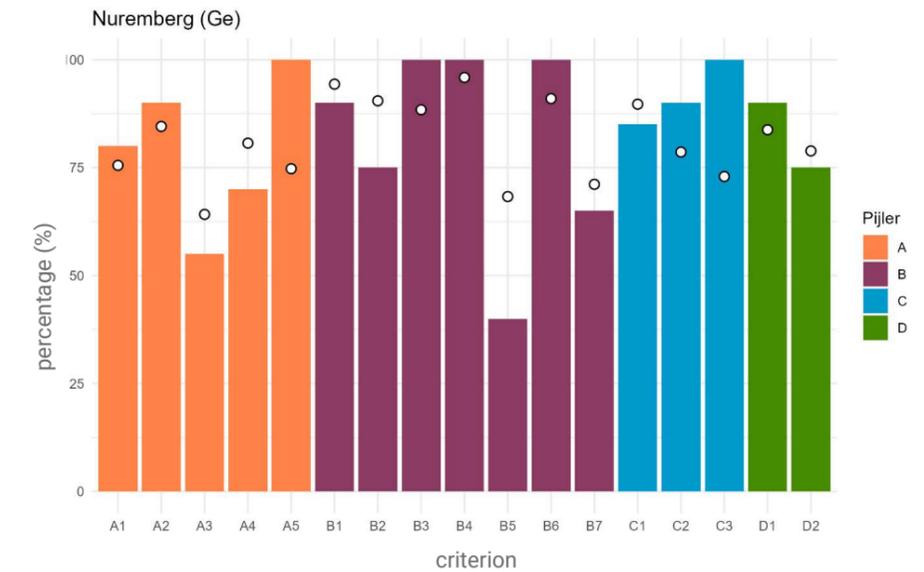
WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Nuremberg, Germany

Number of Schools in the Survey: 10



Strengths

- A network of schools located close to each other meet regularly, with a strong focus on practical exchange of knowledge and experiences.
- Strong support from the National Lead Partner, which specialises in training kitchen staff. A network of caterers has been established that regularly meets around the topic of school meals.
- The appointment of a seconded teacher within the city administration has strengthened the connection with schools and explains the strong performance on C.3 (thematic workshops and educational tools for teachers and other school staff).
- Throughout the project, significant effort was invested in Pillar A (Policy & Leadership). Nuremberg scores well on A.1 and A.2 (working group, action plan).

Weaknesses

- A person has been appointed to develop a food strategy, but the process is strongly driven by the education department, making cross-departmental collaboration difficult.
- Collaboration across city departments to achieve WSFA objectives is challenging due to departmental silos within the city administration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- There is clear political will to develop a food strategy.
- Nuremberg scores very well on criteria B.3, B.4 and B.6 (availability of drinking water, rules on lunch boxes and snacks, and monitoring food waste). Criterion B.2 (healthy, sustainable meals) scores lower, as does B.5 (facilities for children with special dietary needs). However, the intensified engagement with caterers in recent years is expected to contribute to improvements in both the food offer and access to healthy, sustainable meals for children with specific dietary needs.
- The lower score on criterion A.3 (a school food vision endorsed by school leadership) is considered by the city to be mainly a matter of time before formal approval is secured.
- Communication on the school food approach and WSFA activities (A.4) can be strengthened.
- Food is increasingly integrated into lessons and interdisciplinary projects.

Threats

- A person has been appointed to develop a food strategy, but the process remains strongly education-driven, making cross-departmental collaboration difficult.
- Dependence on additional city budgets for implementation.
- Time pressure and limited capacity: schools and kitchens have little time and resources to engage broadly, for example in international exchange.
- Risk that focus shifts to other priorities after this pilot phase ends.

Key lessons learned

A key lesson learned is that the successful implementation of the Whole School Food Approach in Nuremberg relies on structured, practical support and the creation of scalable, sustainable systems. Dedicated roles, such as the seconded teacher, engaged caterers, and active school networks, have proven essential in enabling schools to make tangible progress.

For long-term impact, these support mechanisms need to be institutionally embedded and backed by stable financial and human resources, reducing dependence on individuals or temporary initiatives. Furthermore, promoting the sharing and adaptation of good practices across schools, while providing accessible entry points for less experienced institutions, is critical to ensuring continuity, wider adoption, and the sustained improvement of healthy and sustainable school food environments.

WSFA Implementation in

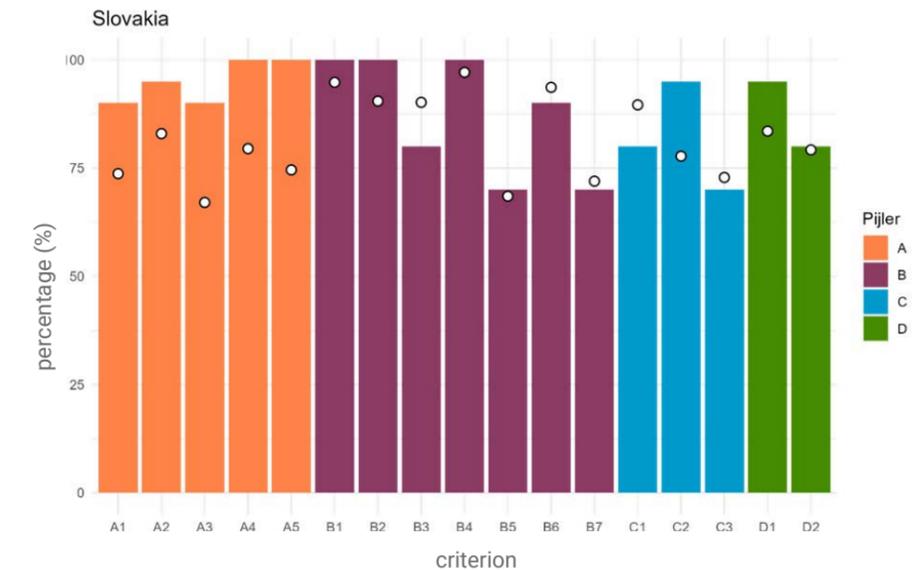
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Slovakia

Number of Schools in the Survey: 21

“The implementation of the SchoolFood4Change programme has brought many benefits to our school. It has helped us improve discipline and efficiency in promoting our activities around healthy eating. Involving parents in school activities is now much easier and more natural. We also value the mutual inspiration between the schools participating in the programme. The programme not only keeps us motivated and active, but also regularly stimulates new ideas and activities. Thanks to this programme, we now have a clearer and more coherent vision of food at our school.”

— Súkromná materská škola Lobelka



Strengths

- School vision and action plan development are above average (A.1–A.4).
- Strong score in A.5 indicates effective youth engagement.
- Schools receive strong support from the NGO Skutočne zdravá škola, which builds on the previously implemented Really-Healthy-Schools programme.
- The NGO brings schools together to exchange ideas and inspire one another.

Weaknesses

- Insufficient additional facilities for students with special or alternative dietary needs (B.6).
- Not all schools have a working group focused on healthy, sustainable food.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Mixed scores within pillar B.
- Strong score in C.2 (hands-on food activities such as planting, harvesting, cooking), but weaker score in C.1 (using food as an educational tool).
- Criterion C.3 (staff training) scores just below average.

Threats

- Limited institutional follow-up. The programme is not linked to city administration, which may lead to a lack of structural support and sustainability after the project ends.

Key lessons learned

Slovakia's experience demonstrates the importance of combining school-level motivation with institutional anchoring. While schools benefit strongly from the expertise, inspiration and coordination provided by Skutočne zdravá škola, the absence of formal links to city administrations or higher government levels threatens continuity.

To ensure long-term impact, WSFA principles should be embedded in local school policy plans, municipal strategies and ideally the national curriculum. A structural partnership with Skutočne zdravá škola, supported by stable funding and a clear mandate, would safeguard the supportive role they currently play. Sustainable progress requires that hands-on activities and strong school visions be reinforced by a robust policy framework and long-term governmental commitment.

WSFA Implementation in

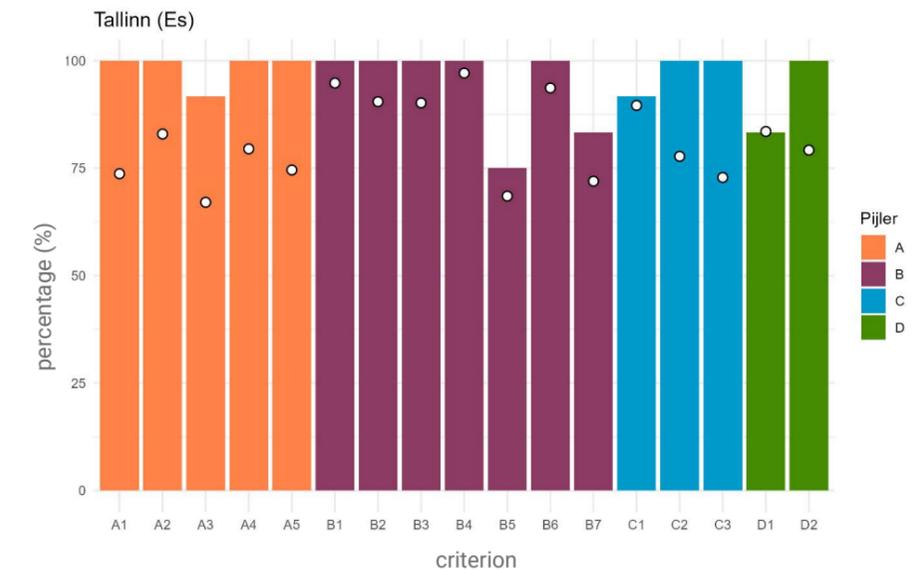
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Tallinn, Estonia

Number of Schools in the Survey: 6

“The SchoolFood4Change programme has given a new impetus to the food culture at Mahtra School. During the project, we started paying more attention to nutrition, health and sustainability. We started collecting feedback on school meals, reducing food waste and separating waste. We also consciously involved pupils in growing plants. Together with the pupils, we are learning and looking for ways to integrate food themes even more effectively into education.”

— Tallinna Mahtra Põhikool



Strengths

- Holistic implementation: In each pillar, all schools in the survey meet several key criteria, showing that the whole-school approach was well understood and applied.
- Policy & communication (A.1, A.2, A.4, D.2): All schools developed a clear vision and action plan and communicated these effectively to staff, pupils and parents.
- Strong participation: Both pupils and parents were actively engaged in actions and decision-making (A.5, D.1).
- Inter-city cooperation: Close collaboration with Viimsi strengthened exchange, learning and consistency.
- High quality of food provision: Schools place strong emphasis on providing good food while working on health, sustainability and social aspects (Pillar B).

- Exemplary work in education (Pillar C): Schools successfully integrated food into the curriculum through interdisciplinary teaching, gardening, harvesting and cooking. This is an important foundation for long-term behavioural change.

Weaknesses

- Not all schools have long-term resource planning for maintaining gardens, practical learning environments, or equipment.
- The collaboration between Tallinn and Viimsi is strong, but there is limited structural coordination at national level, which may lead to fragmentation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Annual evaluation (A.3): Systematic yearly monitoring of action plans would allow continuous improvement and strengthen long-term consistency.
- Healthy lunchbox workshops (B.5): Schools such as Ristiku Põhikool already run successful workshops; expanding these to include snacks and broader eating habits could increase overall impact.
- Parent communication (D.1): Strengthening information to parents about WSFA criteria and including them and the wider community at school activities could boost community cohesion and better align home-school food environments.
- Scaling through networks: The collaboration with Viimsi could evolve into a broader learning network, including other schools in Tallinn and eventually all of Estonia.
- Award-level advancement: Schools can gradually aim for higher WSFA certification levels, incentivising structured progress.

Threats

- Limited institutional anchoring: without a formal link to city or national administration, long-term sustainability may depend too heavily on individual schools.
- Staff turnover: High dependency on motivated principals or teachers may result in loss of momentum if key people leave.
- Funding uncertainty: Practical learning activities (gardens, cooking modules) risk discontinuation without stable, predictable financing.
- Fragmentation between schools: Without city-wide coordination, successful practices may remain isolated rather than embedded
- Regional differences in capacity, budget and quality

Key lessons learned

Tallinn's experience shows that schools can make strong progress through clear visions, active pupil participation and hands-on learning. To ensure long-term impact, however, these efforts must be anchored within municipal and national structures. Embedding WSFA principles into city administration and aligning them with national education, health and food policies, will help secure continuity beyond the project period.

The role of SEI should be formalised with a stable mandate and funding, and schools would benefit from simple monitoring tools and regular evaluations of their action plans, including feedback from pupils and parents. Addressing regional disparities through national standards for meal quality, procurement criteria and meal pricing is essential to ensure equal access for all students. Finally, scaling can be supported by strengthening a local learning network across Tallinn, Viimsi and other Estonian regions to share practices and accelerate progress.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

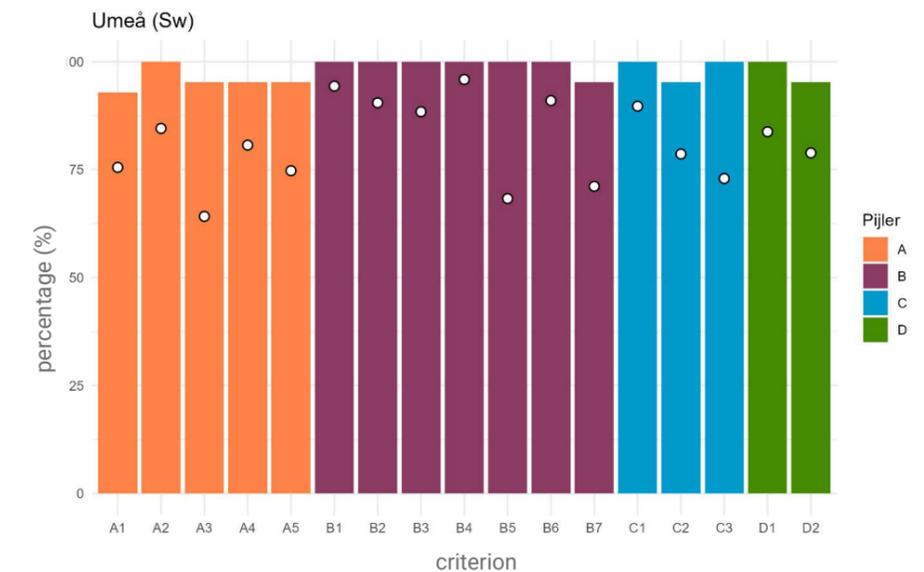
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Umeå, Sweden

Number of Schools in the Survey: 21

"Participation in SF4C has strengthened the school's work on sustainable development, fostering collaboration between teachers, students, and the meal service to make school meals more sustainable. At Grisbacka School, everyone's involvement is key. A concrete example is their 'Vegetable of the Week' in the canteen: the canteen staff selects a vegetable, students learn about it and create drawings displayed in the dining area, and the vegetable is prepared in various ways. This engages both students and staff, inspires trying new flavours, and raises awareness of the ingredients they consume."

— Grisbacka School



Strengths

- Umeå shows above average to high scores across Pillars A, B, C, and D, demonstrating that WSFA implementation in schools goes beyond theory.
- The framework helped strengthen and structure collaboration between different city departments.
- There was a strong focus on promoting food education, which was positively received.

Weaknesses

- WSFA implementation was perceived as very time-consuming.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Leverage the strong engagement and experience gained during SF4C to develop a long-term, city-wide strategy for sustainable school food, ensuring continuity and scaling beyond the pilot schools.

Threats

- A dedicated city staff member was appointed within the School Food 4 Change project and has been highly involved in implementing WSFA in schools. It is currently unclear whether this person can continue after the project ends and whether schools can continue working independently and progress to the next WSFA level (Silver, Gold).
- Strong dependence on resources and technical support for further implementation.

Key lessons learned

A key lesson learned from Umeå is that successful WSFA implementation requires both strong local engagement and institutional support. While high scores across all pillars show that schools can move beyond theory into practice, sustainability depends on stable roles, adequate resources, and continued technical support. Ensuring that schools can continue independently after the pilot phase and progress to higher WSFA levels will be essential for long-term impact, highlighting the importance of planning for continuity and scaling from the outset.

WSFA Implementation in

SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Valencia, Spain

Number of Schools in the Survey: 22

Other = 3 | Valencia = 19

"The implementation of SchoolFood4Change has led to a significant change in the school's food culture. Previously isolated actions were brought together and structured, giving them more coherence, continuity, and visibility. The programme strengthened the school's identity as a healthy, sustainable, and inclusive environment, committed to students' wellbeing, and fostered a more conscious, active, and transformative food culture."

— CEIP Maestro Ismael García

Strengths

- Strong, holistic approach: all WSFA pillars are equally represented.
- Policy anchoring: consolidation of a transversal strategy through the Public Health Actions Portfolio for Educational Centres, applied universally across public and private schools in the region.
- Pre-existing network of public health officers with close links to schools facilitated implementation.
- Active knowledge sharing: e.g. by Mensa Cívica and Fisabio (webinars in Sept. 2023 & Nov. 2024, >40 participants). Public health workers actively monitored implementation and organised workshops to exchange good practices.

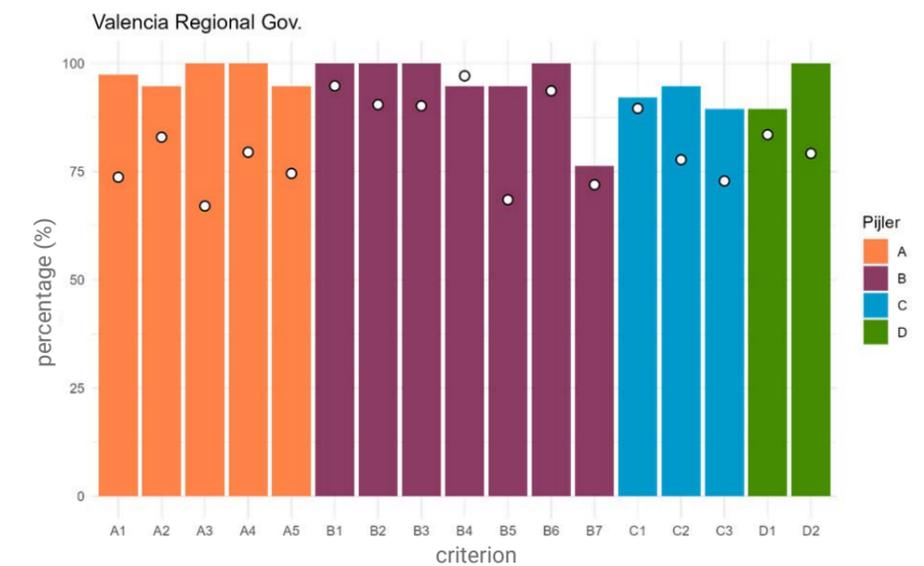
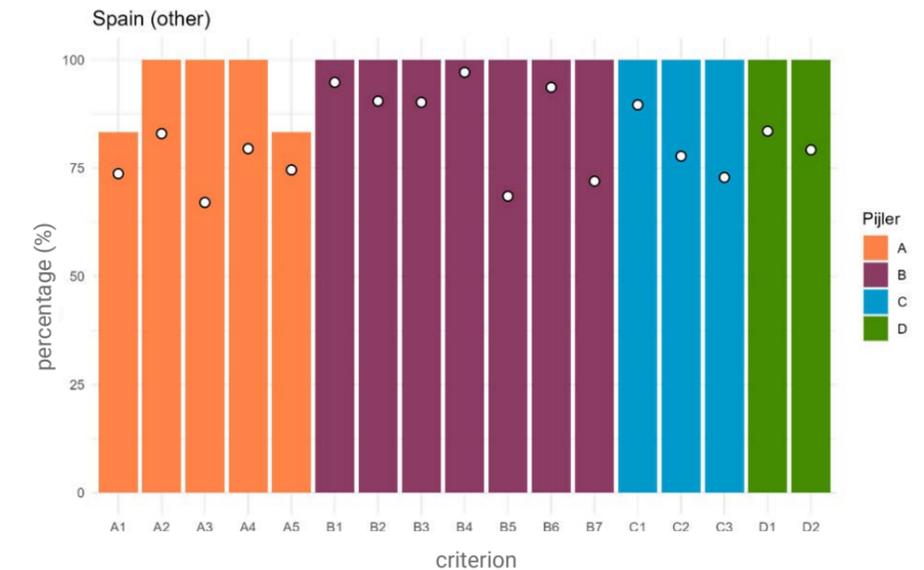


TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Weaknesses

- Discrepancy between implementation between the departments of health and education.

Opportunities

- Internal working groups at schools and student participation can lead to more ownership and increased impact.
- Drinking water provision: not yet guaranteed everywhere in Valencia.
- Regional authorities play a key role in education objectives and school functioning, which provides strong leverage for local adaptation and anchoring.

Threats

- Staff turnover threatens continuity.
- Tackling food waste would further strengthen WSFA but legal barriers exist (cf. interview).
- Resistance from school staff as WSFA implementation is seen by some as additional responsibilities on top of already heavy workloads.
- Voluntary participation of schools increases risk of withdrawal when workload is perceived as too high.

Key lessons learned

Valencia's experience shows that a holistic WSFA approach, supported by existing networks of public health officers and active knowledge sharing, can significantly strengthen school food culture and student wellbeing. Active involvement of school staff, students and internal working groups increases ownership and impact, while linking practical food activities to educational topics ensures a more lasting effect.

At the same time, differences in administrative follow-up, staff turnover and voluntary participation can threaten continuity. This highlights the need for clear coordination, formalised support structures, and simple monitoring tools. Embedding WSFA actions in school plans, regional strategies, and sustained partnerships with organisations like Mensa Cívica helps safeguard progress and supports scaling and adaptation across the region.

WSFA Implementation in

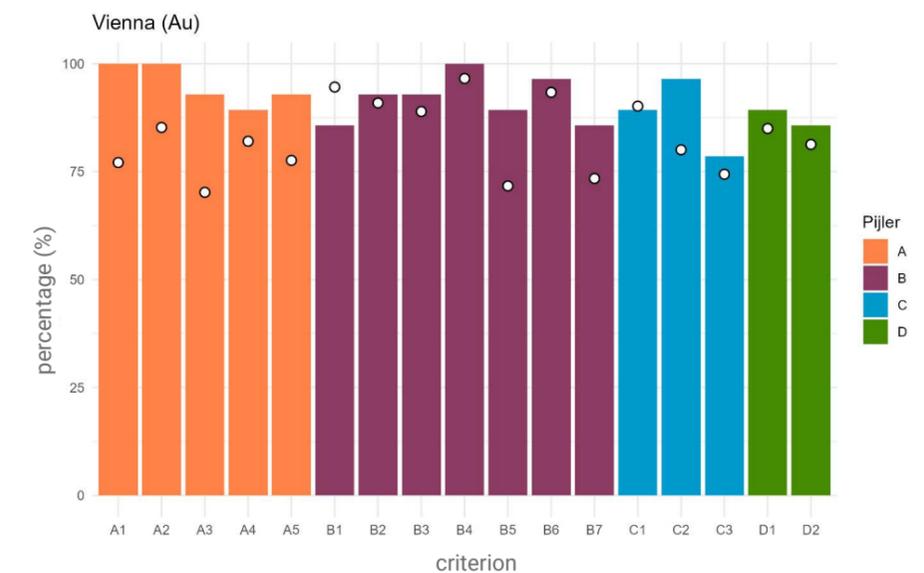
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Vienna, Austria

Number of Schools in the Survey: 14

“By participating in the programme, we have become more aware of everything we teach and do in the field of healthy nutrition. As a school, we worked together on the programme, which brought us closer as a community. New tasks and goals have emerged that we aim to achieve in the coming school years.”

— Offene Volksschule Galileigasse



Strengths

- Schools consistently start with an internal working group and the integration of WSFA criteria into a school-specific food vision (A.1, A.2). Action plans are reviewed annually in most schools, with progress evaluated (A.3).
- Pupils actively contribute to promoting good food practices (A.5). Parents also have opportunities to participate in food-related actions (D.1).
- Internal and external communication (A.4, D.2) about the food vision and action plan fosters broad ownership.
- Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily (B.2–B.6).
- Sufficient attention is given to sustainable practices (e.g. B.7, B.4).
- Teachers have access to adequate teaching materials for food-related education, both in classrooms and beyond (C.2, C.3). Practical workshops are offered for both teachers and students.
- Schools benefit from alignment with the city’s food strategy, in which sustainability and community action are key themes.

Weaknesses

- Many schools approached felt overwhelmed by the list of criteria and therefore chose not to participate.
- Limited commitment within schools to formally achieve criteria and awards due to perceived administrative “burden.”
- Schools stress the importance of ‘time’ as the most lingering factor for all additional activities that they undertake. A lot of schools struggle with a shortage of teachers and therefore struggle with organisational tasks for the project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Greater focus on a pleasant, healthy, and stimulating eating environment (B.1) could improve pupils' experience and strengthen the impact of other efforts.
- Vienna's results regarding the integration of food into the curriculum are slightly below average (C.1). Collaboration with the Department of Education remains challenging.
- Establishment of a transversal working group within the city administration, with explicit ambition to maintain it beyond the SF4C project.
- Alignment with the city of Vienna's food strategy.
- Danachda also supported the schools a lot with the organisation/visit of food related workshops at the schools or at local partner organisations!

Threats

- Danachda, the National Lead Partner, indicated that it was difficult to secure sufficient time and resources within both the city and schools to implement WSFA. Lowering expectations made participation easier, but this should not lead to lowering long-term ambition.
- Schools received strong support from Danachda, particularly in implementing pillar A, which proved a key catalyst for broader WSFA implementation. The loss of financial support for such intermediary partners makes school participation more vulnerable.

Key lessons learned

Vienna's experience demonstrates that establishing internal school working groups and integrating WSFA criteria into school-specific food visions fosters ownership, community engagement, and practical improvements in healthy eating and sustainability. Active participation from pupils and opportunities for parental involvement strengthen the impact of initiatives, while communication of food visions and action plans ensures broad support across the school community. Access to teaching materials and practical workshops for both teachers and students help embed food education into daily practice.

At the same time, schools face challenges such as administrative burden, limited staff time and the complexity of WSFA criteria, which can reduce participation and commitment. Sustained support from intermediary partners like Danachda, user-friendly monitoring tools and structural agreements with the Department of Education are essential to maintain momentum. Embedding WSFA principles into formal policy, aligning with city strategies and facilitating networks for knowledge exchange help safeguard progress, reinforce long-term impact and allow scaling across more schools in Vienna.

WSFA Implementation in

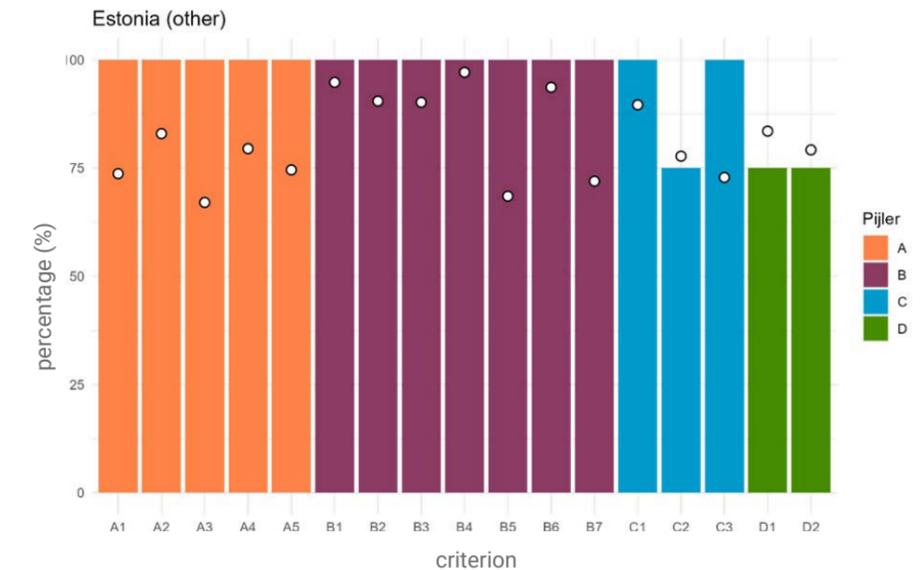
SWOT-analysis per city/region

SWOT-analysis - WSFA implementation in Viimsi, Estonia

Number of Schools in the Survey: 2

"Participation in the project provided an opportunity to introduce the school team to a varied and balanced diet, while also familiarising them with different nutritional options. As part of the project, nutritional education sessions were organised for pupils to raise their awareness of healthy eating and food sources. The project thus contributes to the development of the food culture of both the school team and parents. In addition, the project offers the opportunity to assess the environmental impact of food and hopefully reduce food waste."

— Viimsi Kool



Strengths

- Strong foundation to build upon.
- Maximum scores in pillars A (policy and leadership) and B (nutrition and sustainability).
- Close cooperation with other participating city in Estonia (Tallinn).
- Strong National Lead Partner SEI Tallinn, which facilitates networking between the various cities and schools.
- Strong cooperation with caterers, which promotes the quality of school meals.
- Continuation of activities after the project phase: school nutrition remains a topic on the school and political agenda.

Weaknesses

- Linking C2 (practical approach to nutrition) with C1 (nutrition as an educational topic) can increase the impact of food education.
- Not all schools are equally active or intrinsically motivated; participation is often organised top-down.
- Further cooperation with schools, municipalities and national partners (Ministry of Education, Social Affairs, Student Councils) can promote upscaling and sustainability.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

Chapter 4

Opportunities

- Can C.2 (growing, harvesting, cooking) be linked to criterion C.1 (Food as an educational topic) for which the maximum score is achieved?

Threats

- Less experience with the in-depth involvement of parents and the community, resulting in scores that are just below average.

Key lessons learned

To achieve a holistic and lasting impact, practical food activities should be directly linked to educational topics. Establishing a local learning network across schools in Tallinn, Viimsi, and wider Estonia enables sharing of experiences, teaching materials, and good practices. Collaboration with national partners such as the Ministry of Education, Social Affairs, and Student Councils further supports knowledge exchange, scaling up, and the long-term sustainability of school nutrition initiatives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WSFA Implementation in

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

WSFA Implementation in

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.