

# European Social Marketing Conference 2024

European Social Marketing Association, World Social Marketing, and Fuse Events

**Status:** Decision pending ✓

## Abstract Contents

### Submission Title

Think Global, Eat Local: Proposing a Glocal Social Marketing Approach for Mediterranean Diet adherence in HEI Canteens

### Proposed Conference Track

9. Food and the environment

### Submission Format

20 Minute Oral Presentation

### Session Theme

People & wellbeing

### Abstract

The MedDiet4Campus project aims to enhance adherence to the Mediterranean diet among students in higher education institutions (HEIs) across Portugal, Turkey, and Croatia. The project strategically targets three audience segments: downstream (students and catering staff), midstream (nutritionists, dietitians, and catering managers), and upstream (university decision-makers). This intervention is critical in addressing the nutritional imbalance in university canteen meals, which the literature characterises as high in calories, fats, sugars, and processed meats, and deficient in vegetables, fruits, nuts, and olive oil.

The project is structured around a comprehensive six-stage social marketing plan: diagnosis, objectives, preparation, implementation, final evaluation, and dissemination. A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to gather insights from key stakeholders. Data is collected through exploratory and in-depth interviews with HEI participants and food service providers, alongside surveys administered to students. This data informs each stage of the marketing plan, ensuring a robust and evidence-based strategy.

One of the distinctive features of the project is its "glocal" approach. This [framework](#) involves standardizing tools and practices wherever possible, while simultaneously adapting these strategies to fit the unique cultural and contextual nuances of each participating country. This dual approach ensures that the interventions are both effective and culturally relevant across Portugal, Turkey, and Croatia. The "glocal" strategy is pivotal in overcoming potential resistance and ensuring the sustainability of the dietary changes promoted by the project.

Preliminary results from the project indicate significant potential for informing multiple academic disciplines, including nutrition, health sciences, psychology, and sociology, as well as providing practical insights for health practitioners, NGOs, and food service organizations. Policymakers, including those from national ministries of health, education, and technology, will benefit from the project's findings, which are expected to influence policy and promote healthier eating practices within HEIs.

The MedDiet4Campus project not only addresses immediate dietary issues within university canteens but also contributes to the broader goal of reducing diet-related non-communicable diseases in the Mediterranean region. By fostering healthier eating habits during the critical transition to adulthood, the project aims to establish enduring dietary practices that students can carry into later life.

The MedDiet4Campus project represents an innovative application of social marketing to food services and higher education institutions. Its comprehensive approach, which integrates multiple stakeholders and leverages a glocal strategy, provides a valuable framework for promoting the Mediterranean diet. The project's findings and methodologies offer significant contributions to the field of social marketing and behavioral change, demonstrating the effectiveness of culturally adaptable interventions in improving public health outcomes across diverse national contexts.

### Describe the Priority Audience

The MedDiet4Campus project's primary audience is segmented into three key groups—upstream, midstream, and downstream—among whom behavioral modification is anticipated. Downstream group comprises firstly, first-year undergraduates living away from home or with family, secondly, students from subsequent years or different academic cycles in similar living situations, and thirdly staff from catering companies that supply food in university canteens. The interventions will be conducted in ten Portuguese HEIs, two Turkish HEIs, and one Croatian HEI, corresponding to 131,808 Portuguese students, 63,373 Turkish students, and 69,000 Croatian students. Midstream group includes nutritionists and dietitians from the universities' services and

departments responsible for providing food offerings on campus, as well as top managers from the catering companies that supply food in university canteens. Lastly, upstream group account for decision makers from the universities' services and departments responsible for providing food offerings on campus.

### **Background & purpose: problem statement, location/geography of program**

Europe's food service sector, serving an estimated 165 million meals daily, presents a significant opportunity for public health interventions aimed at educating consumers and shaping their eating habits. Studies have shown that meals offered in university canteens deviate from the Mediterranean diet, being unbalanced, caloric, fat, high in salt, sugars, processed meat, low in vegetables/fruit, nuts and olive oil. This project addresses the issue by implementing a comprehensive social marketing strategy, involving students, food providers, policymakers to promote healthier eating patterns in HEIs' canteens across Portugal, Croatia, and Turkey. This initiative is crucial for university students, who are navigating the transition to adulthood and experiencing lifestyle changes that affect their food choices, potentially leading to increased obesity and related health risks. By adopting a cross-national approach, the project seeks to encourage adherence to the Mediterranean diet, known for its health advantages, and establish enduring healthy eating practices within HEI canteens.

### **Awareness, Knowledge or Behavioural focus**

This project aims at enhancing knowledge and adherence to Mediterranean Diet in HEIs, given its significance for health and sustainability. As many students lack a clear understanding of the Mediterranean Diet, it is crucial to implement initiatives to build up awareness and promote education on the subject. The project also seeks to elevate the perceived benefits of the Mediterranean Diet and reduce barriers to its adoption among the target groups. Implementing such menus demands significant changes in food preparation and presentation, which may elicit negative reactions from consumers. These changes might be misconstrued as cost-cutting measures rather than efforts to promote health and sustainability. To address negative perceptions, awareness campaigns will be conducted. Moreover, food service operators may also resist these changes due to concerns about consumer acceptance, profit margins, and client satisfaction. The diagnostic phase will provide foundational knowledge to help researchers address these challenges and facilitate smoother implementation.

### **Study Design, Methods, and Approaches**

The objective of this project is to design and implement a social marketing plan, divided in six stages: 1. Diagnosis, 2. Objectives, 3. Preparation, 4. Implementation, 5. Final Evaluation, and 6. Dissemination). Hence, the research design of this study demanded a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, to collect data and feed each of the stages of the social marketing plan. Because this is a cross-national project, each methodological decision was replicated for the three countries - Portugal, Croatia, and Turkey - and adapted to each context, whenever necessary. For this reason, the study is empirically developed in ten Portuguese HEIs, two Turkish, and one Croatian. Qualitative data was retrieved from exploratory interviews to identify key stakeholders and in-depth interviews with participants from HEIs and food service providers. Quantitative data was retrieved from surveys to students, including current and potential users of the HEIs canteens.

### **Results - Outcomes/Impact**

The results of the MedDietMenus4Campus project will be crucial for guiding stakeholders through a multidisciplinary approach. Results will hold significant relevance for various academic disciplines, including nutrition, health sciences, psychology, and sociology, as well as for health practitioners (e.g dietitians/nutritionists). Additionally, NGOs, food service organizations, policymakers (e.g World Health Organization), national ministries of health, education, and technology, and research groups focusing on similar topics will benefit from these insights. By providing new information on the adherence to the Mediterranean Diet (MD) within food service institutions, MedDietMenus4Campus is poised to influence policy and inform policymakers. Enhancing knowledge and adherence to the MD is expected to contribute to the reduction of diet-related non-communicable diseases in the Mediterranean region. Given the ongoing nature of this project (two years more), final results are not yet available. However, preliminary outcomes can be disseminated (e.g. stakeholder engagement model, the priority matrix, survey and interview data).

### **Discussion/Implications for Social Marketing and Behaviour Change as a Field**

The application of social marketing to food service and higher education institutions in promoting the Mediterranean diet is innovative. Given the significant changes in eating habits during college years and the high prevalence of obesity, targeting this group is essential. Prior research has primarily focused on students and a narrow set of outcomes, such as satisfaction and gender, neglecting an integrative approach involving multiple stakeholders. This project employs a comprehensive marketing mix, including new menus, student bags, pricing, distribution, communication, partnerships, and policies. Research on cultural differences in social marketing strategies, especially stakeholder engagement, is limited. This project provides valuable tools for engaging stakeholders to improve university students' eating habits in three countries. A notable contribution is the design of glocal social marketing strategies, which standardize tools and practices where possible and adapt them as needed to succeed in different national contexts

### **Two to Three Learner Objectives to complete the sentence, "At the end of this session the learner will be able to:"**

- Understand how the MedDiet4Campus project applies a glocal social marketing approach to a different cultural scenario;
- Acquire the knowledge and skills to use stakeholder engagement strategy in social marketing initiatives aimed at promoting

healthy eating

#### Panel Roster

no answer

#### Programme Listing

This project presents an innovative glocal social marketing approach to promote the Mediterranean diet in HEI canteens across Portugal, Turkey, and Croatia. Traditionally, studies on this topic focus solely on students, but our project engages multiple stakeholders, including food service providers and university administrators. Inspired by "Think Global, Eat Local," we emphasize the importance of adapting social marketing strategies to different cross-cultural scenarios. The project provides a comprehensive approach and delivers significant implications for public health and policy-making.

## UNDERSTANDINGS

#### Registration Fees

☒ YES

#### Copyright

☒ YES

## ABSTRACT

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Your abstract must include 1 primary contact.



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## Presenters

Your abstract must include at least 1 but not more than 5 presenters.



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## Reviewer Comments

There are no comments from the reviewers.