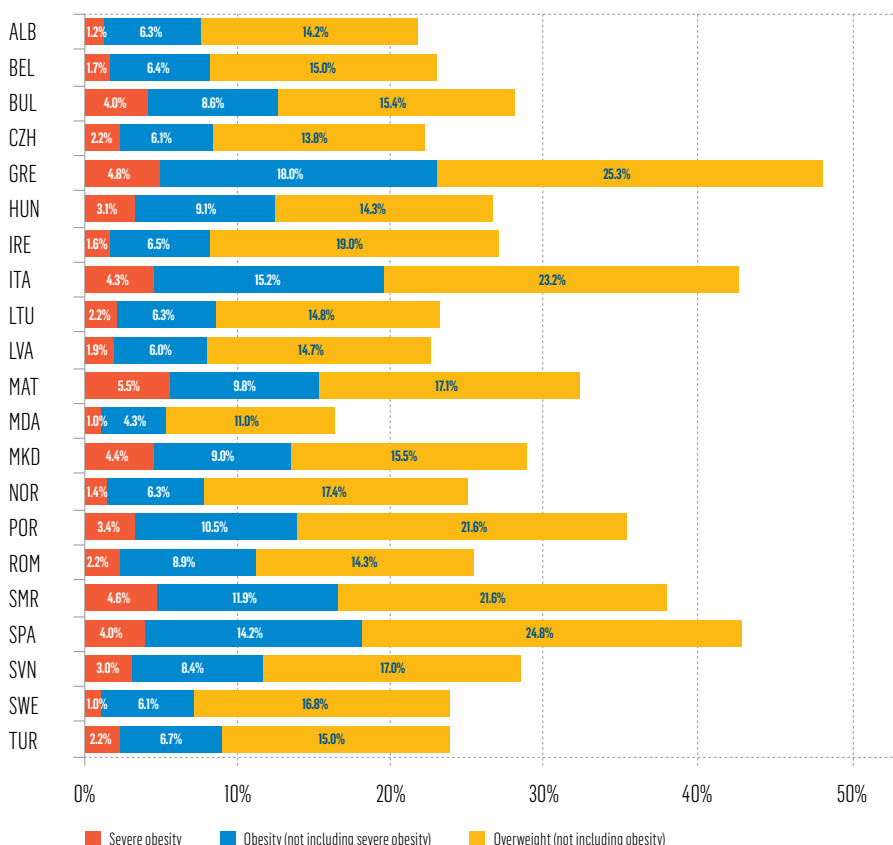


Severe obesity among children aged 6-9 years

This factsheet presents the prevalence of severe obesity in school-aged children from 21 countries participating in the first three rounds of COSI (2007/2008 – 2009/2010 – 2012/2013). Severe obesity in children is defined by WHO using reference growth curves. The details of the analysis are described in a peer-reviewed paper by Spinelli et al, published in Obesity Facts.^{a,b}

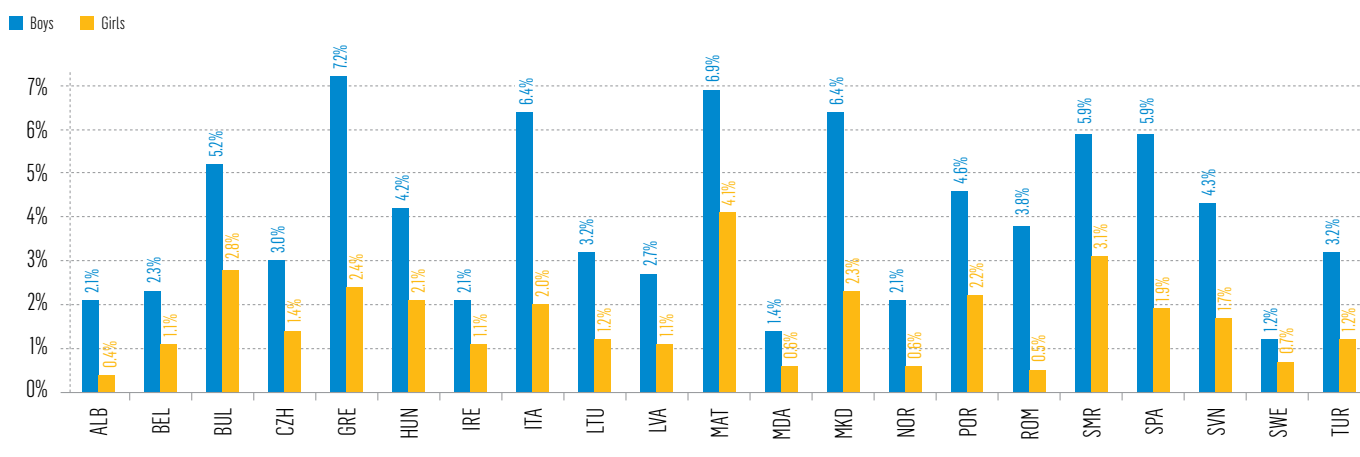
Results from 636,933 children (323,648 boys and 313,285 girls) indicate that the prevalence of severe obesity varied greatly among countries, and was highest in Southern Europe. Severe obesity prevalence ranged from 1.0% in Swedish and Moldovan children, to 5.5% in Maltese children. In many countries, one in four obese children was severely obese.

Prevalence of pre-obesity, obesity (not including severe obesity) and severe obesity



Prevalence of severe obesity based on WHO definitions among boys and girls

The prevalence of severe obesity was generally higher among boys compared to girls. The trend between 2007 and 2013 and the analysis by child's age did not show a clear pattern. Severe obesity was more common among children with a lower maternal education level.



^aSpinelli A, et al. Prevalence of severe obesity among primary schoolchildren in 21 European countries. Obesity Facts (In Press).

^bThe following age groups were included in the analysis: 6-year-olds in Belgium (Flanders) (BEL), Malta (MAT) and Slovenia (SVN); 7-year-olds in BEL, Bulgaria (BUL), Czechia (CZH), Greece (GRE), Hungary (HUN), Ireland (IRE), Latvia (LVA), Lithuania (LTU), Republic of Moldova (MDA), Portugal (POR), Spain (SPA), Sweden (SWE), North Macedonia (MKD) and Turkey (TUR); 8-year-olds in Albania (ALB), BEL, Italy (ITA), Norway (NOR), Romania (ROM), San Marino (SMR); 9-year-olds in BEL, GRE, ITA and SMR.

Policy implications

Around 398,000 children aged 6-9 years (out of 13.7 million in these 21 European countries) are severely obese.



Rising childhood obesity is a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by food systems, commercial interests and social determinants. It has long-term health and social consequences reaching into adulthood. Countries have a duty to prevent and treat childhood obesity to protect children's right to health as per international human rights laws.

Severe obesity is a significant public health issue affecting a large number of children in Europe. Policy approaches can be grouped into 3 main categories:

- 1 **Prevention** strategies should be holistic, and could include programmes such as school-led physical activity initiatives, regulation of advertising of unhealthy foods to children, guidance on age-appropriate portion sizes, and targeted education for parents among others.
- 2 **Treatment** strategies should promote access to quality healthcare free from stigma
- 3 **Surveillance** strategies should include implementation of monitoring systems such as COSI, with appropriate dissemination of results and non-stigmatising reporting in mainstream media and official national health information systems.

About COSI

The WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (or COSI) is a unique system that for over 10 years has measured trends in overweight and obesity among primary school aged children. COSI involves taking standardized weight and height measurements from over 300 000 children across the WHO European Region every three years. This provides nationally representative data for participating countries, as well as a large Region-wide data set for analysis of the determinants of childhood overweight and obesity. This vital collaboration between the World Health Organization and research institutions from across Europe provides high-quality data that is needed to inform policy and practice in response to the challenge of childhood overweight and obesity.

For more information about COSI and recent publications please visit <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/nutrition/activities/who-european-childhood-obesity-surveillance-initiative-cosi>

