

The Food Environment Policy Index Adaptation to the Latin American Context

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Unhealthy food environments are a major driver of obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Government actions are essential to promote and develop adequate environments to prevent and control these conditions. Recently an international research network (INFORMAS) developed diverse protocols to evaluate and benchmark these actions.

The aim of this project was to adapt, one of these protocols to the Latin American context: the Food-Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI), which aims to assess the extent of implementation of government policies and actions to support healthy food environments. For this task, teams in Mexico, Guatemala and Chile have worked together with funding from IDRC (Canada). First we translated the Food-EPI main questionnaire to Spanish. Some of its indicators required special contextualization, and some relevant aspects to food environments in Latin America were not considered. Therefore, additional indicators were developed and the existing ones were rigorously analyzed, adapted and tested.

Some of the new indicators explore: a) access to water both in public spaces and inside schools, this adaptation is relevant for countries where drinking water from the tap is not a common practice; b) policy harmonization, c) regulations on sale and promotion of unhealthy foods inside and around schools; d) governance bodies that look after for policy design, implementation and evaluation; and e) measures to prevent conflict of interest in policymaking.

The Latin American version of the Food-EPI protocol is currently finished and will be applied in Mexico, Chile and Guatemala simultaneously during the next months. One of the most important challenges was to maintain a common set of indicators to allow international comparisons and benchmarking in relevant policy areas, while including new indicators that are relevant for the Latin American context.