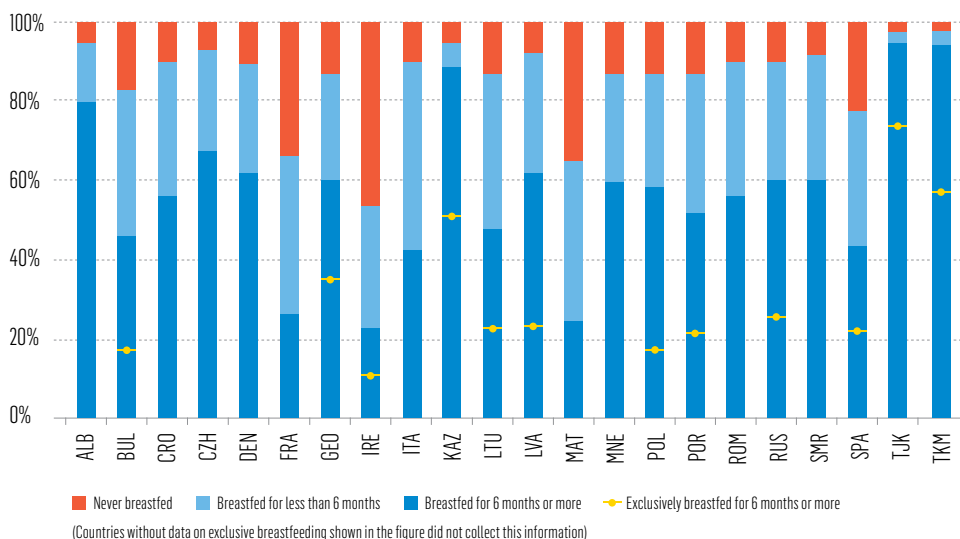


Breastfeeding & obesity

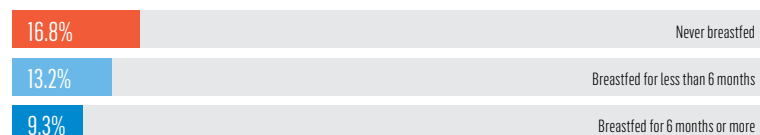
Breastfeeding practices in each country



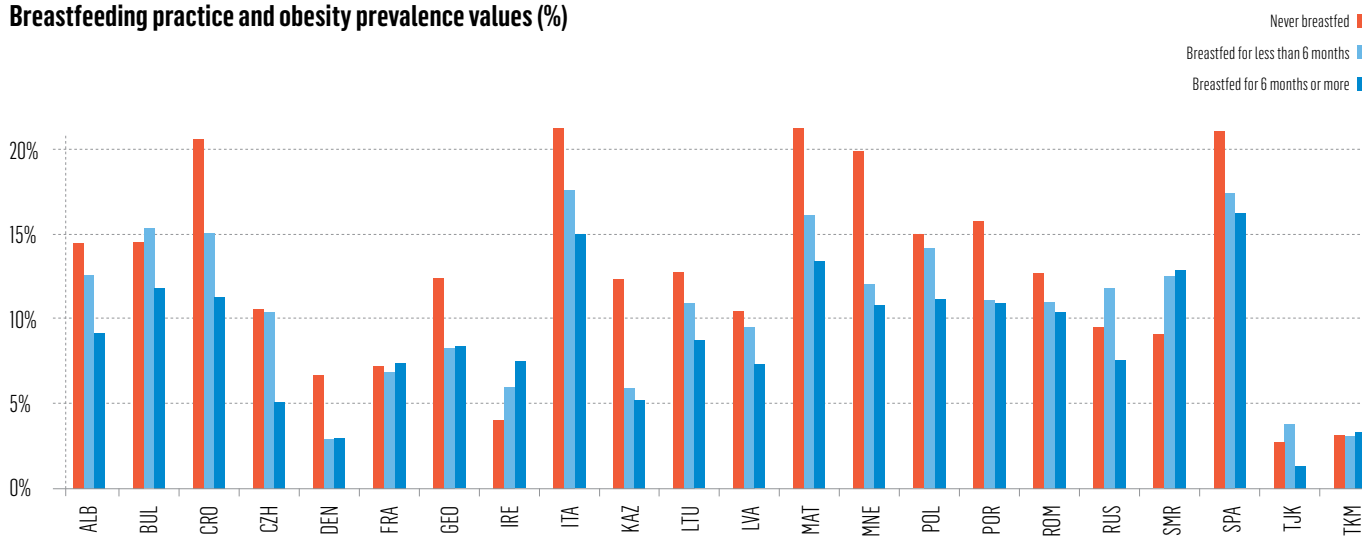
This factsheet describes associations between breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding and obesity among children; using data from 22 countries participating in the fourth round of COSI (n=100 583 children). The details of this analysis are described in a peer-reviewed paper by Rito et al, in Obesity Facts^a. Results indicated wide between-country differences in breastfeeding prevalence.

With a few exceptions such as Ireland and San Marino, all countries showed a higher prevalence of obesity among children who had never been breastfed and/or had been breastfed less than six months compared to those who were breastfed for more than six months. The country-specific results are shown in the graph below.

Overall obesity prevalence among children exclusively breastfed for different time periods (%)^b



Breastfeeding practice and obesity prevalence values (%)



^aRito A, et al. Association between characteristics at birth, breastfeeding, and obesity in 22 countries. The WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative: COSI 2015/2017. Obesity Facts (In Press). The paper analyses the association between characteristics at birth and obesity as well.

^bEstimates were obtained including children from the following countries and age groups: 7-year-olds from BUL, CZH, DEN, GEO, IRE, LVA, LTU, MAT, MNE, POR, RUS, TJK, TKM; 8-year-olds from ALB, CRO, POL, ROM; 9-year-olds from KAZ. Two age groups: 7 and 8-year-olds from FRA and 8 and 9-year-olds from ITA and SMR. SPA included children from all age groups.

ALB-Albania; BUL-Bulgaria; CRO-Croatia; CZH-Czechia; DEN-Denmark; FRA-France; GEO-Georgia; IRE-Ireland; ITA-Italy; KAZ-Kazakhstan; LTU-Lithuania; LVA-Latvia; MAT-Malta; MNE- Montenegro; POL-Poland; POR-Portugal; ROM-Romania; RUS-Russia (Moscow); SMR-San Marino; SPA-Spain; TJK-Tajikistan; TKM-Turkmenistan.

Policy implications

Breastfeeding has a protective effect: obesity is less frequent among children breastfed for at least 6 months



Findings from COSI confirm that breastfeeding protects against childhood obesity. World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding – that is the infant receives breastmilk without any additional food or drink – for the first 6 months of life (followed by introduction of complementary foods and continued breastfeeding up to 2 years and beyond). However, exclusive breastfeeding rates in the WHO European region remain low.

WHO has called on policy-makers to promote, protect and support breastfeeding through:

- Full implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and relevant resolutions through **strong legal measures that are enforced and independently monitored**
- Enacting **paid family leave** and workplace breastfeeding practices
- **Implementation of the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding** in maternity facilities, including providing breastmilk for sick and vulnerable newborns
- **Improved access to skilled breastfeeding counselling** as part of comprehensive breastfeeding policies and programmes in health facilities
- Strengthened links between **health facilities and communities**
- **Strengthened monitoring systems** that track progress of policies, programmes and funding towards achieving global breastfeeding targets



About COSI

The WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (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>

