

# Food Consumption, Media Promotion and Population Health in the Republic of Moldova

Nicolae Mocanu\*, Silviu Stanciu\*\*

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i>                      Received: April 26, 2026                      Accepted: June 10, 2026                      Published: June 30, 2026</p> <p><i>JEL Classification:</i>                      I12, I18, M37, L66</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i>                      food consumption; media promotion; public health; noncommunicable diseases; nutrition; Republic of Moldova; advertising; vulnerable groups</p>	<p>In recent years, food consumption patterns in the Republic of Moldova have undergone significant changes, largely influenced by media promotion strategies and the increasing use of digital platforms in everyday life. Available data indicate that approximately 63.9% of adults are overweight and 22.7% are obese. Cardiovascular diseases accounted for 57.8% of all deaths in 2023, while life expectancy, at approximately 72 years, remained nearly 10 years below the European Union average. Aggressive marketing of ultra-processed foods through television, social media, and other digital platforms, combined with insufficient regulation of food advertising, contributes to the deterioration of dietary habits, particularly among children, adolescents, and rural communities. Law No. 62/2022 on advertising represents legislative progress; however, its enforcement remains limited. This paper examines current food consumption patterns, the role of media in shaping dietary behaviours across population groups, and the strategies needed to promote healthier and more active lifestyles. It also proposes policy measures aimed at protecting vulnerable population groups.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><small><a href="http://www.jards.ugal.ro">Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development Studies (JARDS)</a> © 2026 is licensed under <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">CC BY 4.0</a>.</small></p>

## 1. Introduction

Nutrition is a key determinant of population health and, consequently, of work capacity, quality of life, and the sustainability of national health systems. In recent decades, the global nutrition transition, characterised by a shift from traditional diets rich in fibre and essential nutrients to ultra-processed foods high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat, has contributed to a substantial increase in the global burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) (Willett et al., 2019).

The Republic of Moldova, a lower-middle-income country in Eastern Europe, faces specific nutrition-related public health challenges. Its socioeconomic and institutional context, characterised by relative poverty, limited access to healthcare in rural areas, the rapid digitalisation of the media sector, and evolving regulatory frameworks, may contribute to the spread of unhealthy dietary habits reinforced by aggressive commercial advertising.

This study addresses the need to examine, using recent statistical data, the relationship between food-related media messages, dietary behaviours, and population health.

\*, \*\*Dunarea de Jos University of Galati, Romania. Email addresses: [moldova.nicu@yahoo.com](mailto:moldova.nicu@yahoo.com) (Corresponding author - Mocanu N.), [sstanciu@ugal.ro](mailto:sstanciu@ugal.ro) (S. Stanciu).

The paper focuses on three main dimensions: (1) the current state of food consumption in the Republic of Moldova; (2) the mechanisms used to promote food products through the media across different population groups; and (3) the strategies required to protect vulnerable groups.

## 2. Literature Review

The relationship among food marketing, food consumption, and population health has been widely examined in the international literature. Willett et al. (2019), in the EAT–Lancet Commission report, argued that unhealthy dietary patterns contribute substantially to the global burden of noncommunicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. The report emphasised that improving dietary patterns is essential for reducing diet-related morbidity and mortality worldwide. Monteiro et al. (2019) described the NOVA food classification system, which categorises foods according to the nature, extent, and purpose of industrial processing. Under this system, ultra-processed foods are classified as NOVA Group 4 and are generally formulated from industrial ingredients, with little or no intact whole food.

Their consumption has been associated with an increased risk of obesity, hypertension, and other metabolic disorders. Food insecurity further constrains dietary choices, particularly among low-income households, which may rely more heavily on inexpensive, energy-dense, and nutrient-poor foods (Global Nutrition Report, 2023; Mocanu & Stanciu, 2025). In the context of Eastern Europe, Gross (2002) examined how the post-communist transformation of the media sector facilitated the expansion of commercial advertising in markets where consumer-protection frameworks were still developing. The Republic of Moldova experienced a similar transition, characterised by the rapid growth of commercial media and evolving regulatory mechanisms.

Food choices are increasingly influenced by economic conditions, lifestyle changes, digital information, and evolving consumer preferences (Manolache et al., 2025). The World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe has highlighted the disproportionate influence of food marketing on children and adolescents. Data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study indicate low levels of daily fruit and vegetable consumption and substantial consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages among young people in several countries in the region, including the Republic of Moldova (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2024).

Consumer food choices in the Republic of Moldova are also shaped by national food policies, perceptions of food safety, and trust in the food supply chain (Munteanu Pila et al., 2020).

## 3. Food Consumption in the Republic of Moldova: Statistical Context (2021–2024)

Food consumption patterns in the Republic of Moldova have changed substantially over the past two decades. The 2021 WHO STEPwise Approach to Noncommunicable Disease Risk Factor Surveillance (STEPS) survey, conducted among adults aged 18–69 years, provides comprehensive national-level data on nutrition-related risk factors (Table 1).

The findings indicate a mean body mass index (BMI) of 26.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup> among adults, placing the average value within the overweight range.

They also point to a substantial burden of nutrition-related risk factors in the Republic of Moldova. Compared with European Union averages, the country has a higher prevalence of overweight among men and lower levels of daily fruit and vegetable consumption (World Health Organization, 2022).

**Table 1. Key Food Consumption and Health Risk Indicators, Republic of Moldova (STEPS 2021)**

Indicator	Men (%)	Women (%)	Total (%)
Overweight (BMI $\geq$ 25 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	70.8	57.0	63.9
Obesity (BMI $\geq$ 30 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	22.4	23.0	22.7
Insufficient daily fruit and vegetable intake	~85.0	~80.0	~82.0
Excessive salt intake ( $\geq$ 5 g/day)	~75.0	~65.0	~70.0
Physical inactivity	~40.0	~50.0	~45.0

*Note. Data adapted from World Health Organization (2022) and Agenția Națională pentru Sănătate Publică (2023).*

In addition, a food insecurity rate of 23.5% may further constrain dietary choices, particularly among low-income households that may rely more heavily on inexpensive, energy-dense, and nutrient-poor foods (Global Nutrition Report, 2023).

#### 4. Media Promotion of Food Products: Channels, Strategies, and Effects Across Population Groups

##### 4.1 The Media Landscape and Food Advertising

The Republic of Moldova has a complex and rapidly evolving media landscape. Television remains a major advertising channel in terms of reach and expenditure, followed by digital platforms and social media (Table 2). Law No. 62/2022 on advertising, adopted in March 2022, established an updated legal framework aligned with European Union legislation, including Directive 2006/114/EC on misleading and comparative advertising. However, the Media Forum of the Republic of Moldova reported in 2023 and 2024 that the legislation had not yet produced the expected effects, particularly regarding the regulation of advertising for foods that may be harmful to health.

**Table 2. Food Advertising Channels, Predominantly Promoted Products, and Target Population Groups**

Media channel	Predominantly promoted products	Target population groups	Level of regulation
Television	Sugar-sweetened beverages, fast food, and snacks	Adults and children, including through children's programming	Medium (Law No. 62/2022)
Social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok	Fast food, energy drinks, and nutrient-poor snack foods	Adolescents and young adults	Low
YouTube	Sugar-sweetened beverages and ultra-processed foods	Children and adolescents	Low
Radio	General food products and promotional offers	Adults in rural and urban areas	Medium
Outdoor advertising	Fast food and soft drinks	General population	Medium
Online news media	Food supplements and dietary products	Adults and older adults	Medium

*Note. Authors' elaboration based on data from the Agenția Națională pentru Sănătate Publică (2023), Law No. 62/2022, and reports published by the Media Forum of the Republic of Moldova in 2023 and 2024.*

## 4.2 Vulnerable Population Groups

Children aged 0–14 years represent one of the population groups most vulnerable to food marketing (Table 3). Television advertising and digital content directed at children predominantly promote products high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat. Studies involving school-aged children in the Republic of Moldova indicate frequent consumption of unhealthy snacks, sugar-sweetened beverages, and fast food, including products sold near educational institutions.

Such products are often promoted using persuasive techniques, including animated characters and prizes, which may take advantage of children’s limited ability to critically evaluate commercial messages.

Adolescents and young adults aged 15–24 years are among the most active users of social media in the Republic of Moldova and are frequently exposed to platforms on which food advertising is less strictly regulated. Energy drinks, fast food, and ultra-processed snack foods are promoted through influencers, sponsored content, and algorithmically targeted advertisements. Data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study indicate low levels of daily fruit and vegetable consumption and high consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages among Moldovan adolescents.

Rural populations face a particular nutritional challenge. Despite potentially greater access to fresh seasonal produce, the consumption of ultra-processed foods, including industrially produced snacks, inexpensive processed meats, and sugar-sweetened beverages, appears to be increasing. This trend may be influenced by the expansion of discount retail networks, television advertising, and limited access to nutrition education. Lower levels of media literacy in some rural communities may further increase vulnerability to commercial food marketing. Older adults aged 65 years and above may be particularly exposed to misleading advertising for products presented as having health benefits, including food supplements and herbal products associated with unsubstantiated claims.

The increasing digitalisation of advertising may also limit their access to updated health information while maintaining their exposure to television-based commercial messages.

**Table 3. Summary of Vulnerability Across Population Groups**

Population group	Main media-related risk factors	Vulnerability level
Children aged 0–14 years	Television and YouTube advertising, animated characters, prizes, and promotion of high-sugar foods	Very high
Adolescents and young adults aged 15–24 years	Social media, influencers, sponsored content, and algorithmically targeted advertising	Very high
Low-income adults	Promotion of inexpensive, energy-dense, and nutrient-poor foods; food insecurity	High
Rural populations	Television advertising, discount retail networks, limited nutrition education, and lower media literacy	High
Older adults aged 65 years and above	Misleading supplement advertising, unsubstantiated health claims, and digital exclusion	High
Pregnant and breastfeeding women	Promotion of supplements and breast-milk substitutes with potentially misleading claims	Moderate to high

*Note. Authors’ elaboration based on data from the Agenția Națională pentru Sănătate Publică (2023), World Health Organization (2022), and Law No. 62/2022.*

## 5. Health Status of the Population of the Republic of Moldova: Statistical Data 2021–2024

### 5.1 Demographic and Mortality Indicators

The Republic of Moldova faces significant demographic challenges, including high levels of emigration, population ageing, and elevated mortality from noncommunicable diseases. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova and the Agenția Națională pentru Sănătate Publică, life expectancy at birth reached 72.0 years in 2024 (Table 4). Although this represented an improvement from the pandemic-affected level of 67.6 years recorded in 2021, it remained approximately 10 years below the European Union average of about 82 years (Agenția Națională pentru Sănătate Publică, 2023, 2024; Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova, 2024).

**Table 4. Key Demographic and Health Indicators in the Republic of Moldova, 2021–2024**

Indicator	2021	2022	2023	2024
Life expectancy at birth (years)	67.6	71.6	71.2	72.0
Life expectancy among women (years)	73.2	75.5	75.5	76.4
Life expectancy among men (years)	62.8	67.6	66.6	67.6
Crude mortality rate (per 1,000 population)	17.8	13.1	13.6	13.9
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	10.1	10.5	10.0	11.8
Cardiovascular disease deaths (% of total deaths)	57.0	58.0	57.8	~57.0

*Note. Data compiled from the Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova (2024), Agenția Națională pentru Sănătate Publică (2023), World Health Organization (2024), and IPN (2025). The 2024 value for cardiovascular disease deaths is approximate.*

The gender gap in life expectancy is substantial: on average, men in the Republic of Moldova live nearly 9 years less than women, compared with a gap of approximately 5 years in the European Union. This disparity may be associated with greater exposure among men to multiple risk factors, including unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, alcohol consumption, and tobacco use.

### 5.2 Noncommunicable Diseases and Nutrition-Related Risk Factors

According to data from the World Health Organization and the Agenția Națională pentru Sănătate Publică, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the Republic of Moldova (Table 5).

**Table 5. Prevalence of Major Noncommunicable Diseases and Related Risk Factors**

Disease or condition	Prevalence or rate	Source and year
Overweight among adults (BMI $\geq$ 25 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	63.9%	World Health Organization, 2022
Obesity among adults (BMI $\geq$ 30 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	22.7%	World Health Organization, 2022
Hypertension among adults aged 18–69 years	~40%	World Health Organization, 2022
Type 2 diabetes among adults	~7%–9%	Ministry of Health of the Republic of Moldova, 2023
Cardiovascular disease mortality	57.8% of total deaths	Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova, 2024
Deaths attributable to noncommunicable diseases	~90% of total deaths	World Health Organization, 2023

*Note. Data compiled from the World Health Organization (2022, 2023), the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Moldova (2023), and the Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova (2024).*

Approximately 90% of annual deaths are attributed to NCDs, with cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and certain cancers accounting for most of this burden.

Cardiovascular diseases remain the leading cause of death in the Republic of Moldova, accounting for 57.8% of all recorded deaths in 2023.

Although this proportion decreased slightly from 58.0% in 2022, it remained high compared with European levels. International research has associated this burden with dietary patterns characterised by high intakes of salt, saturated fat, and added sugars. Data from the Agenția Națională pentru Sănătate Publică also indicate rural–urban disparities, with rural populations experiencing more limited access to preventive healthcare, nutrition counselling, and up-to-date health information.

## 6. Legislative Framework for Food Advertising

Adopted in March 2022, Law No. 62/2022 on advertising replaced Law No. 1227/1997 and established an updated legal framework aligned with European Union standards, including Directive 2006/114/EC on misleading and comparative advertising. The law regulates commercial and product-specific advertising, including advertising for food products, and extends its application to the online environment (Table 6).

**Table 6. Key Legislative Provisions and Identified Gaps**

Area	Legal provision	Identified gap or challenge
Advertising directed at minors	General restrictions on misleading advertising under Law No. 62/2022	No specific restrictions on advertising unhealthy foods to children
Digital and online advertising	The law applies to the online environment (Article 2)	Insufficient monitoring and enforcement mechanisms
Nutrition and health claims	Reference to Regulation (EC) No. 1924/2006	Inconsistent application in the domestic market
Outdoor advertising	Authorisation system under Chapter VI of Law No. 62/2022	Frequent placement of advertisements near schools and parks
Self-regulation	Provided for by law on a voluntary basis	Absence of a sector-specific code for food advertising

*Note. Authors' elaboration based on Law No. 62/2022, the Media Forum Resolution (2024), and data from the Agenția Națională pentru Sănătate Publică (2023).*

The Media Forum of the Republic of Moldova reported in 2023 and 2024 that the new legislation had not yet produced the expected effects on the advertising market. Advertising for foods of low nutritional quality continues across multiple media channels with limited restrictions, particularly on digital platforms and social media, where regulatory oversight remains comparatively weak.

## 7. Conclusions

Life expectancy at birth reached 72 years in 2024, remaining nearly 10 years below the European Union average. This pattern is consistent with a mortality profile strongly influenced by noncommunicable diseases, including conditions associated with unhealthy dietary patterns.

Children, adolescents, rural populations, and older adults appear to be particularly vulnerable to food advertising through television, social media, and other digital platforms, while regulatory protection remains limited.

Law No. 62/2022 on advertising represents important legislative progress; however, its implementation and enforcement, particularly in the digital environment and in relation to advertising directed at minors, remain insufficient.

The following strategic recommendations are proposed:

- ❖ restrict advertising for foods of low nutritional quality during television programmes directed at children;
- ❖ introduce mandatory nutrition standards for online food advertising;
- ❖ incorporate media literacy and nutrition education at all levels of education;
- ❖ develop a sector-specific self-regulatory code for food advertising;
- ❖ expand nutrition and health promotion campaigns in rural areas;
- ❖ strengthen the monitoring of food advertising on digital platforms;
- ❖ introduce mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling for processed food products.

## References

- Agencia Națională pentru Sănătate Publică. (2023). *Raport Anual ANSP 2022*. Ministerul Sănătății al Republicii Moldova. <https://ansp.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/RAPORT-ANUAL-activitatea-ANSP-2022-FINAL-16.10.2023.pdf?utm>
- Agencia Națională pentru Sănătate Publică. (2023, March 4). *Ziua mondială de combatere a obezității – 4 martie 2023*. <https://ansp.md/ziua-mondiala-de-combatere-a-obezitatiei-4-martie-2023>
- Agencia Națională pentru Sănătate Publică. (2024). *Raport Anual ANSP 2023*. Ministerul Sănătății al Republicii Moldova. <https://ansp.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/RAPORT-ANUAL-ANSP-2023.pdf>
- Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova. (2024). *Moldova în cifre: Breviar statistic, ediția 2024*. [https://statistica.gov.md/files/files/publicatii\\_electronice/Moldova\\_in\\_cifre/2024/Moldova\\_cifre\\_2024.pdf](https://statistica.gov.md/files/files/publicatii_electronice/Moldova_in_cifre/2024/Moldova_cifre_2024.pdf)
- European Commission. (2023). *Food safety and nutrition policies in Eastern Partnership countries*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2023). *The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2023*. <https://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/2023>
- Forumul Mass-Media din Republica Moldova. (2024). *Rezoluția Forumului Mass-Media 2024*. Consiliul de Presă al Republicii Moldova. <https://www.consiliuldepresa.md>
- Global Nutrition Report. (2023). *2023 global nutrition report*. Development Initiatives. <https://globalnutritionreport.org>
- Gross, P. (2002). *Mass media in post-communist Eastern Europe*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- IPN. (2025, July 9). *Life expectancy in Moldova has slightly increased but remains below the European Union average*. <https://ipn.md/en/the-life-expectancy-in-moldova-has-slightly-increased-but-remains-below-the-european-union-average>
- Manolache, S. B., Nechita, D., Zamfir, C. G., & Stanciu, S. (2025). Emerging trends in food consumer behavior in Romania: A PLS-SEM approach. *E&M Economics and Management*, 28(2), 229–241.

- <https://www.ekonomie-management.cz/archiv/search/detail/2198-emerging-trends-in-food-consumer-behavior-in-romania-a-pls-sem-approach/>
- Mocanu, N., & Stanciu, S. (2025). Food security in the Republic of Moldova: An analysis based on FAO data. *Scientific Papers. Series D. Animal Science*, 68(2), 515–521. <https://animalsciencejournal.usamv.ro/index.php/scientific-papers/current?id=1689>
- Munteanu Pila, M., Stoica, C., Dumitriu, I. M., Florea, A. M., & Stanciu, S. (2020). GMOs and the food supply chain in the Republic of Moldova: National food policies and consumer perception. In K. S. Soliman (Ed.), *Education excellence and innovation management: A 2025 vision to sustain economic development during global challenges—Proceedings of the 35th International Business Information Management Association Conference* (pp. 365–374). International Business Information Management Association. <https://ibima.org/accepted-paper/gmos-and-the-food-supply-chain-in-republic-of-moldova-national-food-policies-and-consumer-perception/>
- Monteiro, C. A., Cannon, G., Levy, R. B., Moubarac, J.-C., Louzada, M. L. C., Rauber, F., Khandpur, N., Cediel, G., Neri, D., Martinez-Steele, E., Baraldi, L. G., & Jaime, P. C. (2019). Ultra-processed foods: What they are and how to identify them. *Public Health Nutrition*, 22(5), 936–941. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980018003762>
- Our World in Data. (2024). *Moldova: Health country profile*. <https://ourworldindata.org/profile/health/moldova>
- Parlamentul Republicii Moldova. (2022). *Legea nr. 62/2022 cu privire la publicitate*. *Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova*. <https://www.legis.md>
- Siminiuc, R., Țurcanu, D., & Siminiuc, S. (2025). Cost and affordability of the food basket in the Republic of Moldova. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 9, Article 1453271. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2025.1453271>
- Willett, W., Rockström, J., Loken, B., Springmann, M., Lang, T., Vermeulen, S., Garnett, T., Tilman, D., DeClerck, F., Wood, A., Jonell, M., Clark, M., Gordon, L. J., Fanzo, J., Hawkes, C., Zurayk, R., Rivera, J. A., De Vries, W., Majele Sibanda, L., ... Murray, C. J. L. (2019). Food in the Anthropocene: The EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *The Lancet*, 393(10170), 447–492. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31788-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31788-4)
- World Health Organization. (2022a). STEPS: Prevalence of noncommunicable disease risk factors in the Republic of Moldova, 2021. WHO Regional Office for Europe. <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2022-6785-46551-67555>
- World Health Organization. (2022b). *Web annex 3. WHO STEPS survey 2021 data book: Prevalence of NCD risk factors in the Republic of Moldova*. WHO Regional Office for Europe.
- World Health Organization. (2022c). *Nutrition and food safety in the Republic of Moldova*. World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe.
- World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. (2024). *A focus on adolescent social contexts in Europe, Central Asia and Canada: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey*. <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289061391>