

International Scientific Committee in charge of coordinating the scientific-based update of the Nutri-Score in the context of its European expansion

- Mandate -

January 2021

1) Background

Nutrition is a major determinant of health. Good nutrition at all stages of life contributes to the maintenance of good health. Conversely, inadequate nutrition, in the sense that it deviates from the recommendations defined by scientific expert groups, is a risk factor for the main chronic diseases (obesity, cardiovascular disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes) or undernutrition. A balance between a healthy diet and being physically active is essential from a public health perspective.

Nutri-Score is a nutrition label that, placed on front side of pre-packaged foods, is intended to allow consumers to quickly assess the nutritional value of a food product, which is a central aspect of its nutritional quality. It permits consumers to easily compare nutritional value of food products within the same food group, or between similar food groups (e.g. consumed with same purpose or during the same meal), and hence make healthier choices at the point of purchase. Nutri-Score is a logo based on a five colours scale (from dark green to dark orange), associated with letters ranging from A (better nutritional option) to E (worse nutritional option). Nutri-Score is calculated using a scientifically validated algorithm. It takes into account, per 100 grams or 100 milliliters of food product, the nutrients amount whose excessive consumption is detrimental to health (energy, salt, sugars and saturated fatty acids), and the amount of nutrients and ingredients to be promoted (proteins, fibre, and also the quantities of fruit, vegetables, pulses, nuts, and rapeseed, walnut and olive oils). Nutri-Score uses an 'across-the-board' approach, whereby all foods are considered using the same criteria. Specific criteria are used in specific food groups (i.e. cheese, added fat, and beverages) where the original algorithm did not accurately reflect the observed variability in nutritional values within these groups. The algorithm underlying the computation of Nutri-Score has been validated in scientific observational studies, which have observed that individuals consuming foods with better scores had lower risk of nutrition-related chronic diseases (e.g. metabolic syndrome, cancers, cardiovascular diseases) or mortality.

Nutri-Score is a valuable tool that can encourage consumers toward healthier food choices, within an integrated framework of national nutritional policies and actions. The algorithm underlying the Nutri-Score system acts in synergy and complementarity with dietary guidelines, health literacy actions through multiple communication channels and recommendations to promote behavioral changes. In addition to behavioral change, Nutri-Score has a potential to further stimulate product reformulation by food business operators. Evidence from research conducted in several countries shows Nutri-Score is currently the best-performing scheme in both aiding consumers to compare the nutritional values of foods across a range of products and to make healthier purchasing choices.

In January 2020, the Nutri-Score label was officially adopted by two countries of the European Union - France (2017) and Belgium (2018) - as well as by Switzerland (2019), and was then adopted by Germany in November 2020. Spain, Netherlands and Luxembourg have officially announced their willingness to adopt it. All these countries are now referred to as the "Countries officially engaged in Nutri-Score" (COEN).

Santé publique France has registered the Nutri-Score system as a trademark at the European level with the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO). The right to regulate the use of Nutri-Score for COEN will be granted by Santé publique France. The right to use Nutri-Score for business operators is given through the Nutri-Score Conditions of use granted to COEN.

In the framework of the European expansion of Nutri-Score, a transnational governance has been set up by the COEN, through a Steering committee and a Scientific committee, to ensure that the Nutri-Score principles and core values are maintained while its implementation is expanded in several countries.

2) Composition and scope of work of the Scientific committee

A Scientific committee is established by the COEN in 2021, whose mandate is to provide independent advice on potential update of the current algorithm of Nutri-Score and the scientific evidence underpinning the public health impact of Nutri-Score.

a. Composition of the Scientific committee and decision making process

The Scientific committee is composed of independent scientists, with a maximum of two per COEN, proposed by each of the national authorities responsible for the implementation of Nutri-Score in these countries, sitting at the Steering committee. The designated scientists do not represent their country of origin or specific interests of sectors in their respective country of origin, but represent science and public health in an international scope. Their membership status is approved after analysis by the Steering committee of their scientific and public health knowledge and experience and absence of conflicts of interest with the private sector. In case of non-approval, the country will be asked to propose a new candidate. The final composition of the Scientific committee will be publicly available, including the curriculum vitae and conflict of interest declarations of each of its members, subject to the prior approval of the members to accord with the General Data Protection Regulation.

The expertise requested from the Scientific committee members is on nutrition, public health, food composition, nutrition information including nutrition labeling, nutrient profile and epidemiological studies. If there is a need to address a specific issue such as social sciences, consumer behaviour, food technology, the Scientific committee could request an external expertise after approval by the Steering committee. These external experts will also have to complete a declaration of interests.

Members from the Scientific committee are appointed for a period of 3 years. Their mandate may be renewed twice. The Committee is chaired by an independent scientist chosen by the Steering committee among the members of the Scientific committee. The chair has authority in the field of nutrition and profiling of foods, and is capable to connect the views of committee members. The chair will be chosen for a period of 3 years and may be renewed twice.

The Scientific committee has the free choice of its operating mode (physical meetings by teleconference/videoconference, e-mail).

The Scientific committee will work on consensus mode to produce its scientific recommendations, or exceptionally by vote if consensus cannot be reached. In case of vote, decisions shall be taken by a majority of two-third of the vote cast. Divergent opinions may be expressed in the final document provided to the Steering committee, along with the subsequent recommendations.

Final decisions on the proposals of the Scientific committee are taken by the Steering committee. A feedback to the Scientific committee is given, in case a proposal of the Scientific committee is not retained by the Steering committee

b. Scope of work

The mandate of the Scientific committee is approved by the Steering committee. The scope of work of the Scientific committee is to:

- study the whole body of scientific knowledge in the field of nutrition and health, in view of new data that may impact the computation of the algorithm
- study the scientific rationale for any request for Nutri-Score update transmitted through the Steering committee.
- study the scientific rationale for also any request received from the food industry, consumers associations and other stakeholders, which are transmitted by the Steering committee and deemed relevant by the Scientific committee. The Scientific Committee may, on an ad hoc basis, elect to invite experts from a non-COEN country to meetings dealing with specific issues, when that non-COEN country has expressed interest in the subject of the meeting for the purpose of its better understanding of Nutri-Score.
- conduct corresponding literature review to assess the evidence of said request.
- propose to the Steering committee evidence-based adjustments, if relevant, to the nutrient profiling system of Nutri-Score, taking into account scientific knowledge and public health issues in the nutritional field, in synergy with the food-based dietary guidelines. For clarification purposes and as way of example, but not limited to, the Scientific committee may work on the thresholds fixed for the elements taken into account for the calculation of the score: the allocation of points, the thresholds fixed per category, or the jumps defined for fixing positive or negative points.

For clarification purposes, the Scientific committee shall not:

- elaborate new nutritional recommendation.
- modify the core principles of Nutri-Score algorithm based on the FSA score or other core elements of Nutri-Score (e.g. the algorithm cannot consider nutrients that are not part of the nutritional declaration such as vitamins or minerals; the calculation will remain per 100 grams or 100 millilitres and not per portion, and should remain transversal to all product categories, except for products like cheese, beverages and added fat for comparability reasons).
- modify the graphical format.
- carry out communication activities related to the opinions and activities of the Scientific committee except if mandated expressly and in writing by the Steering committee.

c. Scientific committee deliverables / outcomes format

The format of the scientific deliverable and outcomes, as well as the format of their subsequent communication to the Steering committee will be decided by the Scientific committee.

d. Scientific committee activities-related expenditures

The expenditures related to the missions of the Scientific committee members will be organised and/or covered by their national authority.

In case additional expenditures should be engaged, e.g. need for additional scientific work such as data analysis or external expertise, the Chairman of the Scientific committee will forward the request to the Steering committee.

3) Miscellaneous

The COEN acknowledge that the Scientific committee needs access to food composition databases, when existing, of all COEN in order to be able to reflect on the effects of the changes of the algorithm considered. This access will be organised at the national level, by each country, under subsequent

confidentiality agreement if relevant. The data will be treated confidentially and be only of use for the purpose of the work of the Scientific committee.

The costs relating to the missions of the national experts will be covered by their country of origin.