



European  
Commission



# Together

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Guide to creating a local  
healthy diets project for pregnant  
& breastfeeding women



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## 1. PROMOTING BETTER HEALTH FOR MOTHERS AND BABIES

It's always the right time to make healthier changes to our lifestyles, but women who are pregnant or breastfeeding are at a unique moment when they are especially motivated to do so – not just for themselves, but also for their children and their entire families. This may have helped to inspire you to take an active role in promoting good health to pregnant and breastfeeding women in your community.

As you probably already know, 'Together' was an EU-funded pilot project to design and test an approach as well as all the supporting tools necessary to promote a healthy lifestyle and diet to pregnant and breastfeeding women. This approach was based on community participation and interaction, and on social bonding. It recognised that new mums and mums-to-be have a lot to share: experiences, doubts, joy, and certainly a lot of laughter; and that good health is a balance of physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing.

If you are reading this replication guide, we hope that you share this perspective on good health, and we applaud you for choosing to take part in helping to promote it. We also hope that this replication guide will help you to incorporate the 'Together' approach into your own community project.

It describes the key messages and objectives of the project, as well as the tools and some suggested activities, which can be adapted to each city's specific needs and resources. It serves as a roadmap to develop and implement your own local project, and monitor and evaluate the results. We also share some important lessons learnt from the 'Together' project, which was implemented from 2015–2016 in six cities across Europe: Manchester, United Kingdom; Murcia, Spain; Odense and Kolding, Denmark; Prague, Czech Republic; and Varna, Bulgaria.

Wherever you implement your own healthy lifestyle project, we are sure that you will find the experience enriching, rewarding and – very importantly – great fun! We sincerely look forward to seeing how better health for mothers and babies takes shape in your community.

## 2. A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH

‘Together’s unique participatory approach was part of what made the pilot project a success. It was implemented by local communities at town or city level and included pregnant and breastfeeding women at every step of the way – from the initial planning, to the activities, and the evaluation of the project’s success.

The actions taken were designed to empower the women to choose a healthier lifestyle, for themselves and for their families. This meant involving all kinds of community actors – healthcare providers, social workers, markets, gymnasiums, local governments and many more. They all came together with the shared aim of bringing better health to their communities, and formed Local Promoting Groups (see section 2.1) to design and implement activities that would achieve this objective.

Involving such diverse local actors impacted more than just individual behaviour. The ‘Together’ project was actually able to change the local environment to one that facilitated individuals to make healthier choices. And the project results have demonstrated that this approach is not only effective for reaching its target group – it is also sustainable, and accessible to all.

It is widely accepted that actions achieve the greatest and longest lasting effect when they affect the local environment where they are implemented, so you may wish to incorporate this approach into your own project.

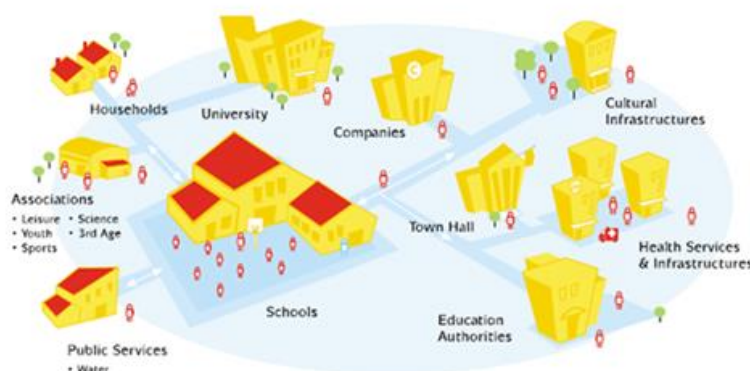
### 2.1. Local Promoting Groups

As a community-based grassroots project, Local Promoting Groups (LPGs) and their collaborators were the backbone of ‘Together’. Each community’s LPG brought together different actors to design and implement a local ‘Together’ action plan, after carefully considering their target groups’ specific needs and the different ways to best meet them.

Each LPG has a local coordinator who acts as a project manager assuring that the actions proposed for members are in line with the objectives and the calendar of the project. Many teams also appoint a facilitator, an expert in the field, who acts as a link between the project and the potential multipliers, for example, a midwife.

You will probably want to involve members of your community in your project by forming an LPG, and it is worthwhile carrying out a preliminary analysis of your community to identify potential members and the different ways that they could participate in your project.

LPGs will begin from different starting points, either built upon existing structures (already operating projects or collaborations), or created from scratch. Their members will come from diverse backgrounds (teachers, midwives, doctors, social workers, community actors, local





authorities...) and should always include members of your target groups, from the beginning and throughout the project.

With such diversity, each LPG member will have different capacities for participation and will engage in the project in different ways. You can view this as a great advantage: it ensures that healthy eating reaches all areas of society, becoming a part of the local culture and bringing healthy habits into everyday life. Each member will also bring their own ideas to the project, and an early brainstorming session can lead to some interesting and creative activities and collaborations.

However, this diversity must also be taken into consideration when defining the role that each LPG member will fulfil, what their strengths and specific capacities are, and what they wish to accomplish through the project. Openly discussing these points in the early stages of the project will help ensure a smooth implementation with satisfying results for all involved.

The **Local Promoting Group in Murcia** is composed of the following institutions and key people:

Local Coordination: Public Health Service of the Municipality of Murcia



#### Members:

- An expert on nutritional pregnancy and early childhood from the University of Murcia
- Three coordinators from the Municipal Social Services Centres.
- Five cultural mediators for the Third Sector, including: Asociación Columbares, Copedeco Asociación Enredando, Puentes de Encuentros, Gypsy Secretariat.
- Two directors of municipal nursery schools.
- Four head nurses or midwives and two social workers from two primary care health centres.
- Three representatives from professional associations related to the project objective: pharmacy, nursing and nutrition.

## 2.2. Target groups

'Together' focused on pregnant and breastfeeding women because they are at a special moment of their lives when choosing healthy behaviour has an effect not only on themselves, but also on their babies. Many women want to protect their babies and give them the best care possible, even before they are born. This makes them especially receptive to adopting healthier lifestyle habits, potentially sharing them with their households, friends and relatives.

These women are often keen to receive trustworthy information about pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding, and also to spend time getting to know other pregnant and breastfeeding women. Becoming a mother is an exciting time, but can also be isolating without peers to share experiences, doubts and

emotions. This was part of 'Together's added value – it's activities all included a strong social element that opened doors to communication and new friendships.

You may choose to focus more on either pregnant or breastfeeding women, or address them with equal attention. While they do share many of the same needs, you will also find that each group has some needs that are more specific. For example, pregnant women may want information about their recommended calorie intake at different moments of pregnancy, or about their upcoming labour experience. On the other hand, new mothers may face issues such as fatigue in the weeks following childbirth, and different issues related to breastfeeding.

## 2.3 Working with disadvantaged groups

Whether you choose to focus on one target group or both of them, we encourage you to reach out to the most disadvantaged members of your community. Disadvantaged communities often have fewer opportunities and face more challenges when it comes to making healthier lifestyle choices than others. An important part of the 'Together' approach was based on reaching these communities to offer more equal opportunities to enjoy good health.

However, there is no single method to approach disadvantaged communities – this will depend on your city's particular demographics, and you will need to carefully consider who the most vulnerable people in your community are. In some cities, they will be ethnic minorities with linguistic barriers, while in other they may be socioeconomically disadvantaged.

It is a good idea to identify and analyse the disadvantaged group or groups in your community, together with the LPG members, to design or adapt the methods and activities to best reach and involve them. Also, if you don't already have members of these groups in your LPG, this is a good moment to recruit them – their insight will be invaluable!

Working with disadvantaged groups will be an enriching part of your project – improving the overall health of any community means improving that of its most vulnerable members. Of course, it can pose some challenges, and we offer you some general suggestions below.

We suggest focusing on:



## EMPOWERMENT



Invite organisations and actors from disadvantaged communities to become part of the LPG, to share what they are already doing to promote healthy habits, and to help develop the project with you. It is an opportunity for different institutions and organisations in the city to collaborate and build bridges between communities that might otherwise have little interaction. Free activities are always highly valued, especially when they have a specific focus. In Murcia, for example, workshops on healthy eating in pregnancy and the breastfeeding period held in Arabic were very well attended.

## RESPECT



When working with disadvantaged groups it is very important to appreciate their cultures - a respectful attitude is key. Acknowledge and celebrate diversity and cultural differences. Learn about new customs and different ways of thinking. This will help you in planning and communicating your activities. Involving trained mediators in your team can help you overcome language and cultural barriers.

## REACHING OUT



Reaching out to disadvantaged communities means literally going to where they are, rather than waiting for them to come to you. Try working with leaders of religious or community centres, local canteens or food banks, and community leaders, service providers and social workers. Strengthen your action plan by including members of disadvantaged groups at all stages.

In 'Together' to encourage vulnerable women to participate in the zero-measurement and post-evaluation surveys, we realised that one-to-one interviews worked better than electronic or paper questionnaires. The best results came from when a project representative called the participant and asked the questions over the phone.

These tips can help you when identifying, getting to know and working with disadvantaged communities:

- Focus groups and interviews can help you gather insight into how to most effectively reach target groups, and gain information about their attitudes, knowledge, behaviours and specific contexts and needs. These findings can be used to frame messages and design activities.
- Examine the whole social environment of each group to identify their issues and optimise communication. Many women from disadvantaged groups face challenges beyond nutrition, exercise and breastfeeding. Link the focus of the project with larger social concerns like income, housing, education and rights.
- In some ethnic communities, you may find that the husband, family and friends play a strong decision-making role in the women's lives, so these people should be considered in communication.
- Identify ways to build an environment that is supportive to making healthier choices. Consider the specific areas where disadvantaged groups live in your city and their particular needs (e.g. better access to fresh produce, more options for exercise, etc.).

### 3. PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION

The methodology for 'Together' was based on participatory communication to achieve changes in individual behaviour, and also in neighbourhoods and cities. This means working with different local actors and targeting group members to analyse our habits and environments, envision ways of changing them and finding the right strategies to do so.

The most important element of this approach is that it enables those who are involved to better understand their own reality, develop their own specific actions, and act. This involvement needs to be built in from the beginning, allowing the target group to participate in the definition of the messages and the design of the communication tools.

By creating a strong feeling of ownership, the project is much more likely to result in lasting change. In 'Together', focus groups were held in each city and in discussion with the LPG, materials were tailored to fit specific local and target group realities. This inclusive approach becomes even more important when the focus groups include vulnerable people.

Here are some additional tips for working with participatory communication:

- Start with what people already know: Hold a brainstorming session to analyse the opinions, views, ideas and understandings that pregnant and breastfeeding women have of the concept of a healthy lifestyle. Try discussing the following points: What do the words health, eating and physical activity mean to them? Follow the investigation-vision-action-change scheme (see below) to plan and carry out further project work.
- Focus the dialogue on action and change: Think of actions to bring about positive changes to different aspects of healthy eating – at individual and community level. Think about how different community actors can play a part in supporting a healthy lifestyle, and about what the women can do for themselves.

- Use a variety of expression methods: Visual, verbal, play (e.g. draw and write; discussion in small groups; community observation; photo-taking; guided tours; mapping the area; dramatisation; timelines; body maps; modelling). Consider different methods for people of different ages, education level, socio-economic and cultural background, etc.

The Action Competence or IVAC model might help guide you in designing your participatory communication actions:



### 3.1. Communication objectives

‘Together’ focused on four areas for action, which helped each city to design its communication strategy. You may also want to use these key areas to help guide you when creating your own strategy. They can be applied to all of the key messages (see following section) and can be helpful to consider when choosing activities.

- **ADVOCATE:** Promote social interaction and healthier lifestyles among pregnant and breastfeeding women, with a focus on a balanced diet and regular physical activity.
- **EDUCATE:** Help women manage pregnancy related weight gain and loss; raise awareness on the benefits of maintaining exclusive breastfeeding for at least six months.
- **MEDIATE:** Help women make the most of advice from health professionals.
- **ENABLE:** Make healthier lifestyles easier to choose and more equally accessible.

### 3.2. Designing a communication strategy

When designing your communication strategy, remember that activities are the core of any participatory project. In our closing survey, the different activities were consistently evaluated as one of the highlights of the project.

Designing the right activities is crucial, and so is making sure that your target groups know about them. This is where your communication strategy comes in, and it is crucial to the success of your project.

You'll want to work with your LPG members to brainstorm and share ideas, but the following tips can help you when you are designing the communication strategy to reach your target groups:

- Know your target groups and think about where you can reach them. Through local health care providers? The municipal market? Religious organisations? What about the disadvantaged members?
- Decide which methods are best to raise awareness of your activities. For pregnant and breastfeeding women, social media is often a good option – just bear in mind it may not be the best option for some disadvantaged groups (such as those with linguistic barriers). You can also ask local community centres, religious centres, supermarkets, etc. to display posters publicising your project events. There are many different options to consider!
- Map out your local interest groups and existing healthy lifestyle initiatives. Think about possible collaborations that could be developed to reach your target groups.
- Think about how you can involve the media. This may include launch events or other special activities that are attractive to the press. Build relationships with those who can help you spread the message, create a database of local journalists and make sure that you keep it up to date. In 'Together' we sent a bi-monthly mailing with updates, press releases and testimonials to journalists and interest groups.
- Key dates: Capitalise on key dates that will help make your story news worthy, for example World Breastfeeding Week.
- Develop a project website and social media to share your activities, information, experiences and lessons learnt.
- Social media: Facebook was identified as being the most suitable channel for the project. We set up an umbrella Facebook page plus 5 closed, local online communities.

#### Tips for Facebook

- Writing clear guidelines and properly training each facilitator at the start is key, as well as continued support and follow up.
- The dedication and enthusiasm of the facilitator affects the success of the group.
- Sometimes, even with active facilitators a group just doesn't work.
- A group needs time to build up, the few months of this project were not enough.
- Points of contact for local information need to be in place at the start of the project (e.g. who to ask for each activity, a contact document and who is mostly active on this network).

### 3.3 Key messages

'Together' identified six key messages – you may wish to focus on one or more than one of them. They are outlined below along with some suggestions on getting them across effectively:

#### Change



Pregnancy is a time of great excitement and emotion. It's also a time of great change. This, along with the fact that pregnant and breastfeeding women often wish to adopt healthier habits to ensure the health of their babies, makes pregnancy an ideal time for change.

This message can come through in all activities, whether they are related to diet or exercise. Change is presented as an opportunity, something positive, by reminding women that they are choosing the right moment to start a healthy new lifestyle.

#### Ask



Many pregnant and breastfeeding women, especially those in disadvantaged communities, report a lack of information on healthy eating. They also express the desire for clear information. These women want answers to their questions.

'Together' aimed to help them to get the information they need by asking their health care and community service providers. It's also essential to communicate with health care providers to make sure that they actively encourage women to speak up if they feel unclear, and to proactively offer additional information, such as brochures.

## Take care



Even before her child is born, a woman has an overwhelming desire to care for and protect it. The key motivator for pregnant and breastfeeding women to make healthy changes is, first and foremost, the health of their baby.

All information given to pregnant women and new mothers should come from this perspective.

For example, while informing about getting the right vitamins, women must be reminded that the vitamins are essential for their child. If discussing how to control weight, the fact that an overweight mother may be more likely to have an overweight child needs to be mentioned. When informing about the “don’ts” of pregnancy (such as the foods they should not be eating; or restrictions on alcohol and tobacco), women must be reminded that these limitations are for the benefit of their babies.

It’s important to underline that these healthy changes are not just for the duration of the pregnancy or the breastfeeding period. They can be maintained in the years to come to keep mothers and children at their optimal physical, mental and emotional health.

## Interact



During pregnancy and as a new mother, a woman can feel very alone. It’s important for her to know that she has the support of a whole range of community service providers, health professionals, and other pregnant and breastfeeding women.

When sharing information about your project’s group activities, the group element has to be emphasised as a great extra benefit. Not only will women gain knowledge and skills to adopt a healthier lifestyle, they will also gain a support network of people who understand them. They may even gain lifelong friends.



This message is especially important when dealing with women who are marginalised or have problems like overweight and obesity. When overcoming a problem, a strong support network of other women can be just what is needed.

### Adopt healthier habits



This key message may seem to go without saying, but it's important enough to keep repeating. Many women simply do not have a clear idea on what constitutes healthier habits (for instance, eating plenty of fruit and vegetables; drinking enough water...).

This message can be worked into a number of activities, for example, eating, shopping or moving together. However, each woman should be approached individually – what is healthy for one might not be appropriate for another and a number of factors (such as weight before pregnancy) must be considered.

Of course, this message is of special importance for women who smoke or drink alcohol during pregnancy or breastfeeding.

### Join the activities!



The core of 'Together' was its participatory approach. It gave pregnant and breastfeeding women the opportunity to learn healthy new habits by taking part in activities and having fun. This meant that to make the project a success, women had to be informed about the activities taking place in their areas. This will be crucial for your project as well!

## 4. IMPLEMENTATION

Now that you have read about the strategic approach and communication methods behind ‘Together’, it’s time to develop your own healthy lifestyle project! Developing a Local Action Plan for your city may seem like a challenging task, but by following the steps outlined below you will see that it is easily managed – and tremendously satisfying. Be sure to collaborate with all of your partners, local interest groups, target group members, and representatives of disadvantaged groups at every step of the way.

### Step 1: Understand your city

Once you have identified your target group(s) and their specific needs, you will need to identify different settings where you can reach the target groups, such as health clinics, community centres, markets, and religious centres, as well as through social media and local media. Do a mapping of existing initiatives in your community, like projects and networks related to promoting healthy diets and regular physical activity. Take advantage of these potential synergies – the aim is collaboration, not competition!

It is important to identify local actors that have access to the target groups and can help to multiply the effects of the project. These include health professionals, community workers, nurses, local volunteers, etc.

Make use of different tools such as mapping workshops, interviewing local health experts, workshops with representatives of the target groups, obtaining information from existing surveys, health reports etc.

### Step 2: Set your objectives

Based on the analysis and mapping of your city, define specific objectives for your project. What are your target groups missing? For example, it may be access to fresh fruit and vegetables, or adequate physical activity. Look for factors that are common to your community, such as vitamin deficiency or high obesity rates, as additional starting points when designing your action plan.

Keep the ‘Together’ communication objectives (see section 3.1) in mind when you are planning your objectives, and try to see the different opportunities to advocate, educate, mediate and enable.

### Step 3: Design the Local Action Plan

This is where your project comes to life!

Design new activities together with LPG members and representatives of the target groups based on the identified needs and objectives of your community. Local interest groups tend to be very keen on getting involved in developing these activities. Ideas are provided in section 5.2.

You should also consider how existing initiatives, projects and networks can come together and incorporate your chosen messages and tools.

Once you have defined your activities and discussed them with the relevant community actors (local gymnasiums, healthcare providers, supermarkets, etc.), develop a calendar of activities. Remember, as part of your action plan, you will need to create a communication strategy. It will be very important for giving visibility to the key messages and actions (see section 3.3).

Here are some additional tips for developing your local Action Plan:

- Involve diverse community actors from all levels and sectors of society;
- Segment your target audiences according to factors (such as age, educational level, cultural background, economic level, etc.) to best identify specific needs;
- Provide basic, accurate information through clear, unambiguous messages;
- Build upon existing health services and initiatives with networks and NGOs to work in collaboration rather than competition;
- Bring together partnerships of public, voluntary and private organisations, and businesses;
- Recruit members of the target groups to act as advocates/ambassadors for the project;
- Don't underestimate cultural norms and social pressures, which may come from religious, ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds.

## Step 4: Implement the project

Once you have chosen your activities and have designed a communication strategy to reach your target groups, you'll put your planning into action. Good organisation will be key, not only to the implementation but also to monitor how well your activities are achieving their specific aims. It is helpful to keep a calendar of activities, with a clear description of where the activities will take place, who will participate and who is responsible for organising them. The chart below is an example of such a calendar:

Activity	Target	Location	Objectives	Organiser
<b>Healthy Together Moving</b>	-To teach mothers they can exercise appropriately when they are pregnant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thomayer Hospital - gym</li> <li>- In the spring, in parks</li> <li>- Swimming pools</li> <li>- Join activities of Czech is Moving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To join ongoing activities at Thomayer Hospital and Czech is Moving</li> <li>- To let mothers, try different activities to choose the best one</li> <li>- To encourage regular exercise during the rest of their life</li> <li>- To help them teach their children to be active</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gynecology and obstetrics clinic and midwives (Lenka Cejpkova)</li> <li>- Czech is Moving (Jitka Literová)</li> </ul>
<b>Healthy Together Shopping</b>	-To teach mothers the right choices for themselves, their new child and the whole family	Ahold (Healthy 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To show pregnant or breastfeeding mothers how to choose healthy food when shopping</li> <li>- To explain why healthy choices are the right choices for mothers and their children</li> <li>- To show mothers that healthy food is not necessarily expensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ahold (Eva Nepokojova)</li> <li>- Dietitians (Vera Bohacova, Nela Hoshlova, Lucie Houfkova, Jitka Tomesova)</li> </ul>
<b>Healthy Together Cooking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To teach new ways of including food</li> <li>- To cook and taste healthy variants of popular meals</li> <li>- To learn how to cook healthy, inexpensive meals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family Center "Balonek"</li> <li>- Healthy 5 and their practice kitchens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To teach mothers how to use healthy food effectively</li> <li>- To involve the whole family in cooking and enjoying healthy meals</li> <li>- To try new meal options as well as healthy versions of traditional meals</li> <li>- To demonstrate how healthy meals are not necessarily expensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thomayer Hospital (Jitka Soukupova)</li> <li>- Ahold (Eva Nepokojova)</li> <li>- Dietitian (Vera Bohacova)</li> </ul>
<b>Healthy Together Talks</b>	- To share experiences about nutrition with mothers and the dietitian	- Family Center "Balonek"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To discuss the issue of nutrition in the group of pregnant or breastfeeding mothers with the dietitian</li> <li>- To learn the basics of breastfeeding and child nutrition</li> <li>- To teach mothers to choose healthy food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thomayer Hospital (Jitka Soukupova)</li> <li>- Dietitians (Vera Bohacova, Nela Hoshlova, Lucie Houfkova)</li> </ul>
<b>Individual counselling with a dietitian and mid-wife</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual nutritional counselling</li> <li>-Breastfeeding counselling</li> <li>- child nutrition counselling</li> </ul>	- Thomayer hospital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual nutritional counselling when needed</li> <li>- Individual breastfeeding counselling when needed</li> <li>- Counselling in the field of child nutrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thomayer Hospital</li> <li>- Dietitians (Nela Hoshlova, Lucie Houfkova)</li> <li>- Midwives (La League League)</li> </ul>
<b>Online Other</b>	- Online counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facebook</li> <li>- online forums</li> </ul>	- Online counselling in the field of nutrition for pregnant and breastfeeding women	- Thomayer Hospital (Jitka Tomesova)

<b>activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Invitations to join activities</li> <li>- Healthy tips</li> </ul>	and chats for mums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online counselling around suitable physical activities</li> <li>- Invitations to other project activities</li> <li>- Correction of nutrition myths by the dietitian</li> <li>- Healthy tips</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dietitian (Vera Bohacova)</li> <li>- Midwife (La Leche League)</li> </ul>
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The model above is especially helpful because, in addition to serving as a calendar, it helps to coordinate different community partners that are taking part in the activities. For example, if you are organising a healthy cooking class, you may need to collaborate with a civic centre or school canteen for use of their kitchen.

You can also use a version of this calendar for promotion among your target group members, which would include a description of activities with the dates, times and locations where they will take place. Distribute printed versions of the calendar each month to local health care providers, social workers, community centres and other multipliers who can deliver the calendars to your target audience. You can also publish the calendar on your project website, social media, or even through local media. The more women know about your activities, the more successful your project will be!

Apart from the regular activities, consider organising a local launch event to give visibility to the project.

## Organising a launch event

Launch events are important to get your project off the ground successfully and raise awareness among target group members, local/regional policymakers, media and other interest groups.

Begin by brainstorming the kinds of activities and attractions that would be most appealing to your target groups, especially those from disadvantaged communities. Some ideas could include an event with healthy foods to sample, information and recipes; exercise activities like yoga classes or tai chi in a local park, and workshops on healthy shopping, cooking and eating.

The ‘Together’ cities’ launch events took place on the same day, and were packed with diverse activities: informal discussion groups with nutritional experts, yoga and aqua gym classes, groups meals, cooking demonstrations, breastfeeding workshops, and more. Feel free to use your imagination and all local resources – get creative!

You should also think about where your target group members are and how you will reach them. Where is the best place to put posters and other promotional materials about the event? Are there any high-profile community members who could help spread the news? Can you collaborate with health providers, social workers, municipal gyms, supermarkets? Putting in some time and effort to your launch event will pay off in the long term through the success of your project!

Note that the involvement of local companies should be avoided (e.g. funding, logos in communication activities, free products in hand-out bags, etc.) to guarantee full independence.





## Step 5: Evaluate and disseminate the results

Remember to build evaluation and dissemination components into all your efforts. This will give your project value, as it will provide valuable data and lessons learnt for others who wish to create healthy eating projects in their local communities. It will also validate your hard work with clear results, which is very rewarding.

Don't forget, the launch event is appealing to the media, and you should take advantage of the opportunity to promote your project. Take an inventory of your local press; this should include traditional media like television stations, radio stations and newspapers as well as "new" media such as online newspapers and relevant social media pages. Contact all of them beforehand with a save-the-date invitation, giving an overall scope of your project and an appealing preview of what's to come at the launch event. Highlight the local element, and mention well-known stakeholders' participation.

### Evaluation

Evaluation is essential to allow you to draw conclusions from your intervention, to assess the use of resources and to fine tune future projects. It does not need to be burdensome, but it must be designed at the onset of the project to be effective. The points below provide a general outline to include evaluation at all stages of your project:

- Define key objectives and variables;
- Establish a statistically significant base line or control group;
- Engage with participants throughout the project;
- Gather contact information for follow-up;
- Follow up activities after a period of time with surveys and/or focus groups.

To assess behavioural change and judge the impact of your project it is imperative that the same participants answer your questions at the beginning and at the end of your project. This is the only way to see if what you did changed the way they eat, exercise and interact with their peers. Remember, it is important that your project lasts a sufficient length of time to allow for change to take place. How much time you need will depend upon the objectives of your project. Read more in Chapter 6.



## Dissemination

Conclusions, recommendations and lessons learnt not only showcase the results of your hard work but can also encourage others to set up even more projects. It can also have an influence on local health policy. Dissemination furthermore promotes the sustainability of your project. Early thoughts on the sustainability and transferability of the project and its results are important. Look out for opportunities on how your project activities can continue after the project ends. You'll be pleased by how many of your collaborators want to continue the activities past the designated time frame, but you can also expand the activities into new territory!

Start discussions with neighbouring or sister cities how the project ideas and results can be shared and used there.

To compile your results, get together with all your partners, interest groups and target group members to draw conclusions from the project actions, discuss how the project was implemented and how it could be improved, and identify possible collaborations for the future.

Consider the following questions:

- What is the purpose of your dissemination? Would you like to see your project replicated? Influence political policy? Earn recognition for those who took part in the project?
- What will you disseminate? Results? Recommendations?
- Who will your audience be? Health interest groups? Politicians? The general public?
- How will the dissemination take place? Through social media or a website? An event? Local press?
- When will the dissemination take place? Have you allowed sufficient time to see the true results of your intervention.

The answers to these questions should give you a clearer picture of your dissemination plan.

## Organise a closing event

Closing events are a perfect occasion to disseminate the main outcomes of the project among local interest groups and press. These events also raise awareness of the project among target group members. After 10 months of activities for pregnant and breastfeeding women, including swimming classes, yoga, pilates, healthy shopping and cooking sessions, breastfeeding support groups, nature walks, lectures by health professionals, and many more, the 'Together' cities organised five simultaneous events to mark the end of the project. The aim of these local dissemination events was to present the project, showcase the project tools/materials and share the local project outcomes. The closing events highlighted the success of the initiative and its positive impact on the women involved, according to its comparative research. The closing events promoted results and key messages, also ensuring the project's sustainability and transferability to other European cities which might replicate the methodology.



## 5. TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

### 5.1. The tools

'Together' has created a range of educational and promotional tools for use by organisations and professionals who want to spread the messages of the project. They are all available for download on the 'Together' website, and you may find them useful for your project.

#### Handbook

Provides extensive information for LPGs, including key project messages and objectives, how to reach disadvantaged groups, how to take advantage of existing resources in each community, and ideas for activities both during pregnancy and after the birth.



#### Leaflet



Created for distribution by LPGs to the target groups and multipliers, containing key messages, recommendations for pregnancy and breastfeeding period, and an invitation to participate in 'Together' activities. You can use these for your project, or adapt the information to create your own leaflets.

#### Poster



To be hung by LPG members in their premises and elsewhere (with permission) to raise awareness of the 'Together' project and communicate its key messages. Again, you can use the posters as they are, provided you obtain a license for the photo, or you can use them for inspiration to design your own!

## Tote Bag



To be filled by LPGs with relevant information and items, and distributed to the target group. Contents can come from existing local initiatives, but no commercially branded merchandise, please!

## Magnets



Designed with the 'Together' project identity, to be placed on the refrigerator door as a helpful reminder to eat healthily and move regularly.

## 5.2. The activities

Activities are the heart of participatory initiatives. They directly involve your target groups, showing them what is healthy rather than telling them. Activities also create a true sense of ownership among the participants, increasing the impact of your project and its messages exponentially.

'Together' placed a great deal of importance on target group members interacting with their peers – this is especially important for pregnant women and new mothers, who are at risk of feeling isolated during a time when they need to share and communicate more than ever. This made the activities even more important than usual.

This guide provides a selection of proposed activities that can be adapted to the specific needs of your target groups. Of course, you will also come up with new ideas depending on the resources and existing initiatives in your community, and you are encouraged to do so! Remember, your project can gain a great deal of strength and impact by collaborating with the initiatives that already exist in your city.

Whether the activities are brand-new or developed in collaboration with existing initiatives, they should always have a clear objective, for example:

- Educating pregnant and breastfeeding women on shopping for healthy food with visits to the local market guided by a nutrition expert;
- Organise meetings with local healthcare providers to discuss how to better communicate with the target groups, especially the disadvantaged members;
- Promote healthier lifestyles through activities like group walks, or special exercise classes for pregnant women or new mothers and their babies (yoga is often a good option);

- Provide incentives to food retailers to offer healthier food and beverage choices in underserved areas, or especially for pregnant women and new mothers.

These are just a few ideas, but you can refer to the ‘Together’ communication objectives for added inspiration (section 3.1). When planning, don’t forget to make the extra effort to reach members of disadvantaged groups!

Here are some real examples of activities that the ‘Together’ cities organised during the pilot project implementation. You are welcome to replicate these activities or adapt them to better suit your community and target groups.





In Odense and Kolding, the ‘Together’ team hosted regular yoga classes for pregnant women as well as group walking excursions on the area’s many nature trails.

Prague made a special effort to reach Roma women with exercise classes directed especially at these communities.



Varna held group discussions with nutrition and breastfeeding experts, so women could ask all of their questions in a comfortable and informal environment.

Murcia offered group cooking workshops to discuss nutrition and how to prepare home cooked meals with fresh ingredients.



Manchester collaborated with local gyms to offer free swimming and pilates classes to pregnant women.

You can read more about the ‘Together’ activities on the project website:

<http://together-project.eu/activities>

There is also a wide variety of proposed activities in the [‘Together’ handbook](#), also available on the website.

Be sure to carefully evaluate the involvement of local companies (e.g. funding, logos in communication activities, free products in hand-out bags, etc.) to guarantee full independence.

## 6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

'Together' aimed to provide evidence-based information that could be used to support future health policies at a local, regional and European level. For this reason, it was essential to monitor and evaluate the project development and target groups' attitudes and behaviour in regards to the 'Together' activities and key messages.

You may wish to replicate the methods for monitoring and evaluation outlined in the sections below or use similar methods for your project.

### 6.1. Pre-evaluation

Before designing an action plan, it is helpful to survey members of the chosen target groups to measure awareness, behaviour, opinions and attitudes with respect to healthy eating and lifestyles during and after pregnancy. This "zero measurement" should take the form of a questionnaire to be completed individually, either on paper or online. This will give you a baseline measurement to start with, and from there you can choose the areas to most focus on for your project.

You may find that your target groups especially lack information about nutrition during pregnancy, or that a large percentage of them are not planning to breastfeed their babies. The information that you obtain from the zero measurement will be highly valuable in designing an effective project.

This measurement is also essential for evaluating the effectiveness of your project activities after they've been implemented. It is important to maintain contact with as many participants from the zero measurement as possible, to be able to compare initial and final attitudes and behaviours. Be sure to gather contact details with the survey during the zero measurement, and include as a last question whether the women agree to be contacted once again for a follow-up survey.

Keep in mind, maintaining contact with pregnant women can be difficult – especially once they've had their babies. One way to keep in touch with this target group is by starting a Facebook group. This is especially ideal for new mothers who are craving contact with other mums but struggle to find the time to go to social events. However, some of your target group members may not participate much in social media (consider, for example, ethnic minorities who don't speak the language well). For these women, you will need to develop an alternative strategy.

You may wish to offer an incentive to your target group for completing the required evaluations and maintaining contact (e.g. by raffling blenders or other project related prizes). Think also about local interest groups (such as a supermarket that might collaborate by offering vouchers).



## 6.2. Post-evaluation

Post-evaluation takes place after a pre-determined period of time; for 'Together' this was one year. This doesn't mean your project has to finish, only that at this time you will evaluate your project results for dissemination and future improvement of the activities and communication.

Post-evaluation should cover:

- Memory of your project and its activities;
- Appreciation of the project and of any tools and materials used;
- Impact of the project in terms of awareness of intended messages, changes in attitude towards healthy diets, and changes in eating and exercise behaviour.

Post-evaluation should use much of the same questionnaire as the zero measurement to allow for the results to be comparable. Share the results at a dissemination workshop – this will be an attractive event for local interest groups and the press. Try also to interest your local government in your results to potentially support the development of future policy.



### Eating, Drinking and Exercise Survey

#### General

Unique ID number:

Date:

Dear participant,

This questionnaire is part of a pilot project in your city to encourage healthy lifestyles of mothers and mums to be. The questionnaire will take only **15 minutes** to fill in. Your responses will **always remain confidential**.

Answers are provided on a voluntary basis and collected anonymously. No link will be made between these answers and any information permitting to identify their origin. The statistical results will not allow for the identification of a person.

Please complete the questionnaire as honestly as possible, there are no 'good' or 'bad' answers.

We thank you very much for your participation!

1



#### Tell us about yourself:

S1. Do you live in or close to Manchester?

- Yes  
 No

S2. Are you pregnant at this moment?

- Yes  
 No

S3. Please indicate how long you are pregnant:

\_\_ weeks

S6a. How will you feed your baby (babies)?

- Breastfeed  
 Bottle feed (formula)  
 Mix of breast milk, water, tea and formula (bottle feed)

S7a. Please indicate your main occupational status:

- Working full-time  
 Working part-time  
 Full time student  
 Unable to work because of illness  
 Unemployed/ seeking employment  
 Maternity leave  
 Looking after your home and/or family  
 Living on independent means (not seeking employment)  
 Other

2



Eating, Drinking and Exercise Survey

**General**

Unique ID number:	
Date:	

Dear participant,

This questionnaire is part of a pilot project in your city to encourage healthy lifestyles of mothers and mums to be. The questionnaire will take only **15 minutes** to fill in. Your responses will **always remain confidential**.

Answers are provided on a voluntary basis and collected anonymously. No link will be made between these answers and any information permitting to identify their origin. The statistical results will not allow for the identification of a person.

Please complete the questionnaire as honestly as possible, there are no 'good' or 'bad' answers.

We thank you very much for your participation!



**Tell me about yourself**

S1. Do you live in or close to Manchester?

- Yes
- No

S2. Are you pregnant at this moment?

- Yes
- No

S4. Did you give birth six or less than six months ago?

- Yes
- Yes, multiple birth (twins, triplets...)
- No

S5. How old is your baby? (In case of twins, triplets, ... : how old are your babies?)

\_\_\_months

S6b. How have you been feeding your baby (babies)? (tick a box next to each statement)

	Up to month 1	Up to month 2	Up to month 3	Up to month 4	Up to month 5	Up to month 6
1. Only breastmilk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Only Bottle feeding Formula	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Mix of breast milk, water, tea and formula (bottle feed)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Tips for the evaluation

### Evaluation criteria and samples

- ✓ Goals and timings need to be communicated at the beginning of the project
- ✓ Methodology should be clear from the beginning
- ✓ Changes to sample sizes and target groups during fieldwork period should be avoided at any cost as this has a negative impact on fieldwork duration and feasibility

### Timing

- ✓ Be sure to have an extensive set-up period. Ideally: 6 months set-up period, one year of project execution and 6 months closing period (post evaluation, stakeholder survey, reporting of the whole project)
- ✓ Avoid overlap of zero-measurement, project and post-evaluation as it:
  - Reduces the focus of LPGs on an aspect of the project (execution, evaluation)
  - Reduces the chance to measure project impact

### Fieldwork period

- ✓ To maximise participation, the fieldwork period should exclude holiday periods
- ✓ Work with incentives to stimulate participation, and definitely re-participation
- ✓ Use short, easy to understand questionnaires

## 7. LESSONS LEARNT

Based on the results of the pre- and post-evaluation, as well as general feedback from the LPGs during the implementation of the 'Together' project, we have compiled some lessons learnt that you may find helpful.

The tips listed below provide insights on project implementation and development, and project strengths and challenges. They are intended to help you avoid some of the difficulties encountered by those involved in 'Together'.

- Activities are key. The project is not one of didactical education but is based on dialogue-promoting initiatives that put the target groups in the centre. Activities were the ideal way to connect to the target groups and convey the 'Together' messages. Take care to develop activities that your target groups truly want and need.
- Clearly identify the different ethnic and socio-economic groups you will target, and accurately represent them. This applies to any promotional materials you may need to produce for your local events, and to the events and activities themselves. Are you planning a group meal? Be sure to serve foods that are familiar to your target groups. An exercise activity? Some groups may not be comfortable exercising in public. Taking these factors into account will greatly increase the success of the project.
- Create and adapt online materials to your specific needs. Social media like Facebook can be highly useful in engaging pregnant women and new mothers. Just be sure to keep the page regularly updated with relevant information and activities.
- To be able to evaluate your work and the results, take monitoring into account from the beginning to reduce work in this area later on and to ensure the most accurate findings. It is especially important to gather statistically representative groups that agree to take part in the monitoring and evaluation for an adequate duration of time. Pregnant and breastfeeding women can be challenging in this aspect – one of the best methods for maintaining regular engagement with this target group is social media.
- Create a Facebook page for your target groups. Pregnant and breastfeeding women can be challenging to engage with on a regular basis. They are busy – especially new mothers – but they also crave interaction with other mums. A Facebook page lets them stay connected with their peers at the moments when it is convenient. Make a special effort to keep it updated and to engage women in online dialogue as well as in real activities.
- Plan for your project to last long enough to allow for behavioural changes to take place and be observed. One year should be considered as a minimum, but you may find this is not long enough.
- Develop synergies with and build upon existing initiatives: events, groups, other communication project materials, etc. Strive to engage with existing services and projects, first mapping existing

local initiatives. Working with existing initiatives, projects and networks is also a way of ensuring the sustainability of the project.

- The success of your project will depend largely on getting interest groups to take ownership of the project and get fully involved in implementing activities. Besides, the dedication and enthusiasm of the coordinator greatly affects the success of the project. Dedicate time and effort to the motivation and training of your partners.
- During the implementation of the activities in any city, linguistic and cultural barriers can arise. This is especially true for certain disadvantaged groups like ethnic minorities and migrants, which must be taken into account from the beginning.
- Reach target groups by going to where they are rather than expecting them to come to the project. Map community entry points and leaders who can help you to reach them.
- Current financial pressure in Europe makes it difficult to hope that organisations will provide resources and staff on a good will basis alone. You may need to offer financial compensation or think of other creative ways to make participation worthwhile.

## 8. FIND OUT MORE

Visit the 'Together' website to find out more about the project and its messages, activities and findings:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/nutrition\\_physical\\_activity/projects/ep\\_funded\\_projects\\_en.htm#fragment0](http://ec.europa.eu/health/nutrition_physical_activity/projects/ep_funded_projects_en.htm#fragment0)

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