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Global Leaders in the Fight Against Obesity: Top 10 Countries Making Strides Toward a Healthier Future



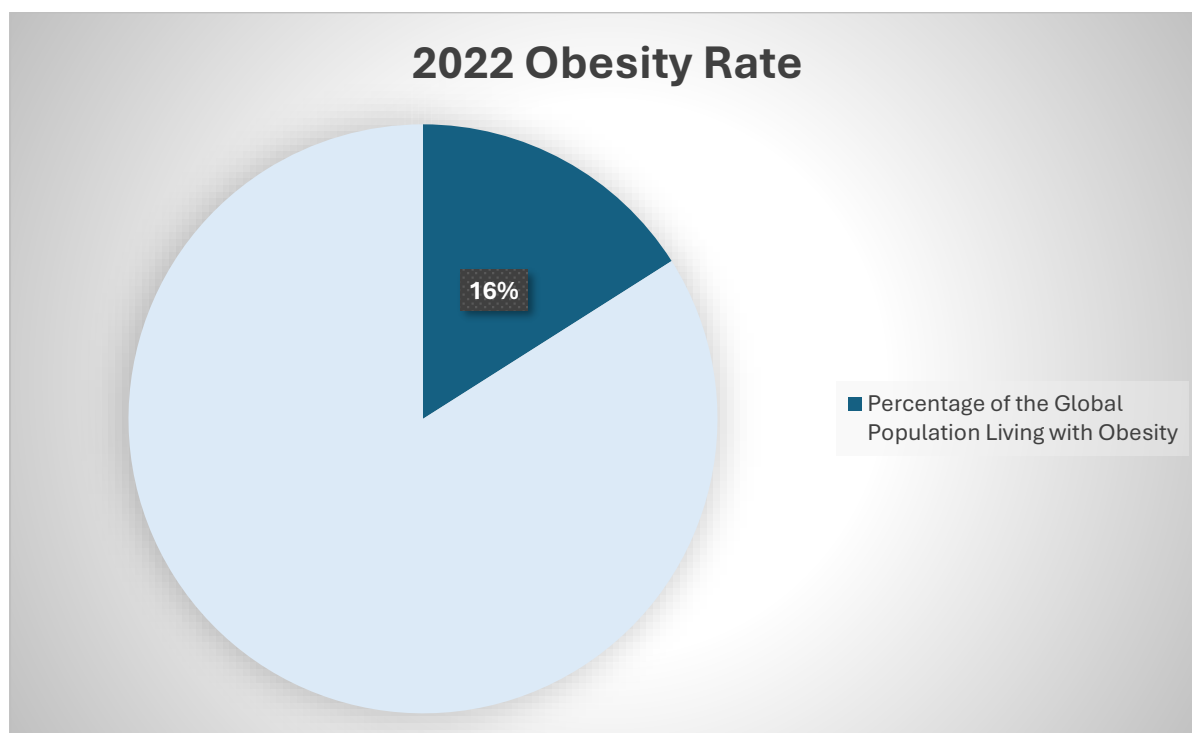
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Addressing the Growing Obesity Crisis

Obesity has emerged as a critical global health challenge, contributing to a surge in non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular ailments, diabetes, and metabolic disorders. The rapid increase in obesity rates can be attributed to shifting lifestyle patterns, urbanization, and a growing reliance on highly processed foods, which often contain excessive sugar, unhealthy fats, and artificial additives. Without effective interventions, obesity is poised to become one of the most significant public health crises of the 21st century, placing immense pressure on healthcare systems and economies worldwide.

The urgency of addressing obesity is underscored by recent statistics. In 2022, 16% of the world's adult population was living with obesity. The prevalence of adult obesity has more than doubled since 1990, while adolescent obesity has increased fourfold. As of 2022, around 2.5 billion adults aged 18 and older were classified as overweight, with 890 million falling into the obesity category. These alarming figures highlight the necessity for immediate and sustained action to curb obesity and its associated health risks.



Recognizing the growing burden of obesity, the Frost & Sullivan Institute has made ‘Innovating to Zero Obesity’ a key healthcare priority. By drawing insights from countries with relatively lower obesity rates, it is possible to identify and adapt best practices that can be integrated into diverse healthcare systems worldwide.

The global fight against obesity demands urgent and coordinated action, with governments playing a pivotal role in shaping policies that drive meaningful change. While scientific research has long established the health risks associated with obesity, effectively addressing the crisis requires more than awareness—it necessitates systemic shifts in industry accountability, public advocacy, and equitable policy implementation.

This article highlights ten countries leading the charge in obesity prevention through innovative and impactful strategies. These nations recognize that combatting obesity extends beyond individual choices and into the realm of social responsibility, where corporate influence, media engagement, and economic policies all play defining roles. Successful initiatives range from stringent regulations on the food industry and sugar taxation to leveraging media for public mobilization and ensuring equitable access to nutritious food.

By examining these countries’ efforts, this article underscores the importance of sustained commitment, collaboration, and policy-driven interventions in shaping a healthier future for all.

Research Methodology

This study identifies the top 10 global leaders in combating obesity through a structured, multi-stage filtering and ranking process. The methodology integrates both quantitative and qualitative analysis to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of each country’s efforts in promoting a healthier population.

1. Data Selection and Filtering

The initial selection of countries was based on global obesity prevalence rates. Given that the worldwide average adult obesity rate stands at ¹16% as of 2022, only countries with obesity rates below this threshold were considered for further analysis. This criterion ensured that selected nations already demonstrated a relatively lower obesity burden.

To refine the selection, additional key health indicators were incorporated:

Undernourishment Rate: Countries with undernourishment rates higher than the ²2022 global average of 9.2% were removed, ensuring that public health efforts addressed both overnutrition and undernutrition.

¹ [Obesity and overweight](#)

² [— SDG Indicators](#)

Change in Obesity Rate (2012-2022): Countries where the increase in obesity rate from 2012 to 2022 was higher than the global average were removed, focusing on nations that have effectively managed obesity trends.

Beyond this, countries with a higher number and impact of policies/initiatives were selected as the top 10.

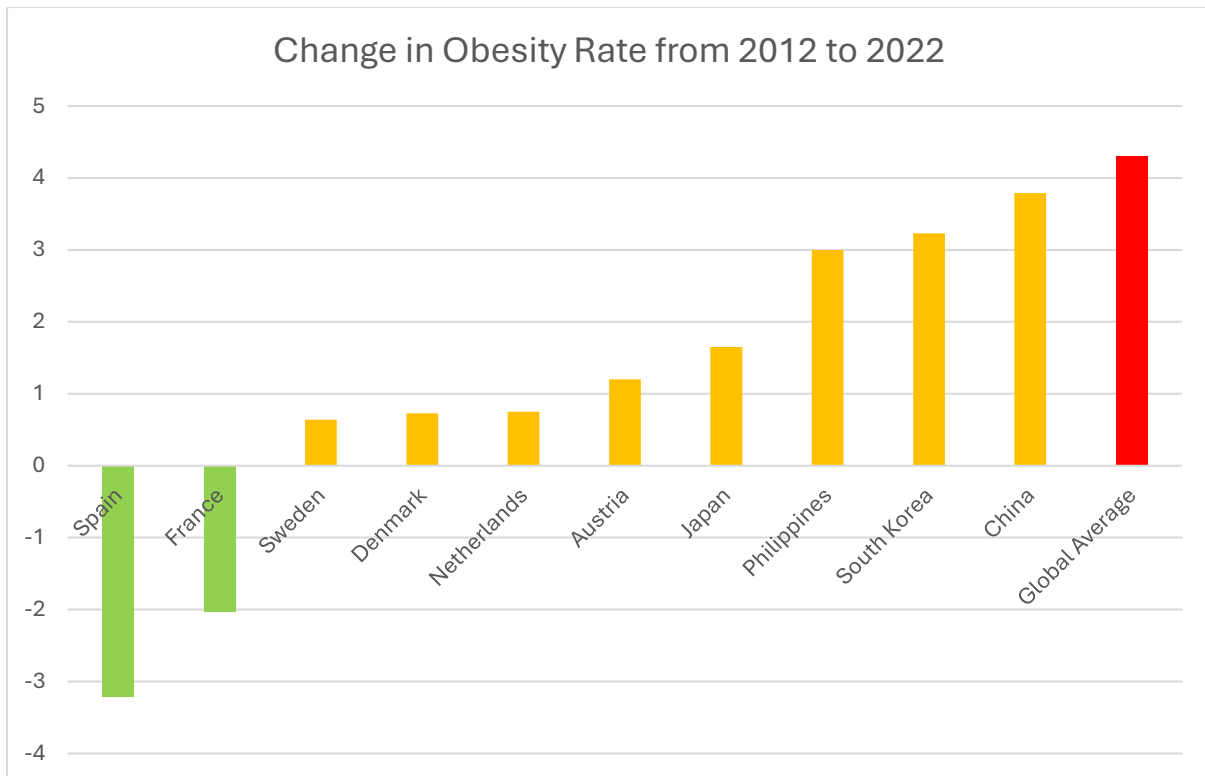
2. Weighted Ranking Process

After filtering the countries based on the above criteria, a weighted ranking system was applied to ensure a balanced evaluation of each nation's performance. The ranking considered four key metrics, each assigned a specific weightage based on its significance in obesity prevention:

- **Government Policies and Initiatives (40%):** The presence and effectiveness of national policies played the most significant role in ranking. This includes regulations on food labeling, taxation policies on unhealthy foods, public health campaigns, and infrastructure supporting physical activity.
- **Average Physical Inactivity Rate (20%):** Physical inactivity is a key contributor to obesity. Countries with lower inactivity rates were ranked higher, as active lifestyles play a crucial role in obesity prevention.
- **Obesity Rate as of 2022 (20%):** This metric holds considerable weight as it reflects the effectiveness of a country's interventions in maintaining a low obesity rate.
- **Change in Obesity Rate (2012-2022) (20%):** This metric assesses how well countries have managed obesity trends over the past decade. A lower increase in obesity rate indicates more effective public health measures.

Each country was ranked separately for each metric, and scores were assigned based on their relative performance. The final ranking was determined using a weighted composite score, where each metric's rank was multiplied by its respective weight and summed to derive the overall ranking.

By integrating statistical data with policy evaluations, this study highlights the countries making the most significant strides toward a healthier future. The final ranking reflects a balanced assessment of both health outcomes and proactive governmental efforts to combat obesity on a national scale.



The bar chart presents the change in obesity rates from 2012 to 2022, highlighting that the increase in obesity rates across the top 10 countries remains lower than the global average. This suggests that the policies and interventions implemented in these nations have been relatively effective in mitigating the rise in obesity. Notably, France and Spain stand out with a decline in obesity rate, underscoring the potential impact of targeted health initiatives. These findings indicate that best practices from these countries could be adapted and scaled globally to address rising obesity rates more effectively.

Now, let us delve into the top 10 countries leading the charge against obesity and examine the innovative strategies they have employed to promote healthier lifestyles and reduce obesity rates.

TOP 10 COUNTRIES BASED ON OBESITY SCORES AND PREVENTIVE POLICIES



Countries	Denmark	Spain	Netherlands	France	China	Sweden	Austria	Japan	South Korea	Philippines
Obesity score	5	1	4	6	8	3	2	10	9	7
Policies score	10	9	8	6	5	4	7	3	1	2
Obesity Management Score	7	10	6	10	1	8	5	4	2	3
Physical inactivity score	6	8	8	5	10	9	4	3	3	1
Final Score	7.6	7.4	6.8	6.6	5.8	5.6	5	4.6	3.2	3
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

• Policies Score - 60% (higher score = more impactful policies)
• Obesity score - 20% (higher score = lower obesity rate)

• Obesity Management score - 20% (higher score = better global relative management of obesity from 2012 to 2022)
• Physical activity score - 20% (higher score = more physically active)

1. Denmark (Obesity Rate: 13.28%)

Denmark has been proactive in promoting physical activity and healthy eating through various national campaigns and policies. Here are some key initiatives:

- **ABC - All Children Cycle:** This national campaign, founded by the Danish Cycling Federation, promotes cycling among children in grades 0-10, including cycling to school. The campaign includes a competition between schools and classes to encourage regular cycling. In 2023, almost 100,000 students from schools across the country participated with their teachers during the first two weeks of September.
- **Danish Sports Policy (2016):** This policy ensures that all groups in society participate in sports or exercise. Special efforts are made to involve children, adolescents, adults not already involved in organized sports, and disabled or vulnerable groups. A funding pool has been set up to promote cycling, with the State funding part of the projects, usually 40% of the costs. Municipalities and organizations can apply for grants for projects to promote cycling, including cycling to school and work, development of biking paths, recreational cycling schemes, and tourism and development projects.
- **Advertising Regulations:** Advertising aimed at children and young people must not encourage or condone excessive consumption of foods and beverages containing substances such as fats, trans fatty acids, salt or sodium, and sugars. This regulation was adopted in June 2013.

- **Danish Whole Grain Logo:** The Whole Grain food label aims to increase the availability of whole grain products and enhance knowledge of their positive effects. Products must meet nutritional criteria set by the Danish Whole Grain Partnership and the Nordic Keyhole's nutrient profile. The number of products labeled with the whole grain logo increased from 190 in 2010 to 1097 in 2019. 68% of Danes are familiar with the logo, and 80% of them shop according to it. The average daily intake of whole grains increased from 36 grams per 10 MJ before the campaign started to 82 grams per 10 MJ in 2019.
- **The School Patrol:** This national school-based scheme promotes physical activity and play. Older students (grades 6-9) from participating schools promote play and physical activity during breaks to younger children (grades 1-6). Approximately 4-5 students per school and one leader are recruited from every school. Founded in 2007 by the Danish School Sports Association, the Cancer Society, and the Danish Gymnastics Federation, the scheme has trained 10,000 students as Play Patrol instructors. 40% of schools have a Play Patrol every day, and since 2016, 600 schools have trained students to be Play Patrols.
- **Bike to Work:** The Danish Cyclist Federation established this national campaign to encourage people to use their bicycles for everyday transport. Various schemes have been developed by the Company Sport Association and implemented by the Danish Working Environment Authority to promote physical activity in workplaces. In May 2019, 59,144 participants collectively cycled over 9 million kilometers.

2. Spain (Obesity Rate: 15.67%)

Spain has implemented several policies and initiatives to combat obesity, particularly focusing on childhood obesity. Here are some key initiatives:

- **Value Added Tax on Sugary Drinks:** In 2021, the Spanish government increased the VAT for sugary drinks from 10% to 21% to address rising obesity rates.
- **Nutritional Labelling System:** Spain's health ministry launched a nutritional labelling system for all food sold in supermarkets, featuring five colors and an A-E grading scale.
- **Maximum Limit for Salt in Bread:** In April 2019, a mandatory limit for salt content in bread was set through Royal Decree 308/2019. The maximum allowable salt in ordinary bread is 1.66 grams per 100 grams.
- **Excise Tax on Sugar-Sweetened Beverages in Catalonia:** Three and a half years after Catalonia introduced a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), per capita purchases of these drinks declined by 16.7%. The average price of SSBs increased by €0.11 per liter, an 11% rise.

- **Thao-Salud Infantil:** This childhood obesity prevention program aims to promote healthy living styles in children aged 0-12 and their families. It is a community-based program applied in municipalities through the mobilization of local actors. In 2008, the first assessment showed a decrease in childhood obesity prevalence from 6.8% to 6.3% over four years. By the 2014-2015 academic year, the program reached 70 municipalities in 7 autonomous communities, impacting about 150,000 children.
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3. Netherlands (Obesity Rate: 14.54%)

The Netherlands has implemented several policies and initiatives to combat obesity, focusing on nutritional labeling, lifestyle interventions, and community programs. Here are some key initiatives:

- **Nutri-Score Food Choice Logo:** As of January 1, 2024, the Netherlands adopted the Nutri-Score food choice logo as its official voluntary nutritional labeling scheme.
 - **Cool (Coaching on Lifestyle):** This combined lifestyle intervention includes a basic and a maintenance program with an intake interview, 2 individual interviews, 8 group meetings, and a final interview. It aims to achieve sustainable lifestyle changes, weight loss, improved physical fitness, health benefits, and better quality of life. The program is covered by basic insurance for eligible participants.
 - **Amsterdam Healthy Weight Programme (AHWP):** This multiannual program has achieved significant milestones, including a ban on marketing unhealthy food to children at sports events, training over 500 healthcare/youth professionals, engaging more than 200 health ambassadors, involving over 25,000 school children in the Jump-in program, and identifying and treating more than 1,500 severely obese children. The program operates in 11 focus neighborhoods and has reached over 1,200 preschool parents.
 - **LEFF (Lifestyle, Energy, Fun & Friends):** The Dutch version of the UK MEND program, LEFF is a combined lifestyle intervention where families work in groups for 10 weeks on healthy eating and exercise, aimed at children aged 7-12. More than 700 children and their parents have participated in LEFF across 10 municipalities.
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4. France (Obesity Rate: 9.7%)

France has implemented several policies and initiatives to combat obesity, focusing on reducing the consumption of sugary drinks and unhealthy snacks, and promoting healthier lifestyles. Here are some key initiatives:

- **Order of 18 January 2017:** Prohibits the provision of unlimited sugary drinks, free or for a fixed price, in restaurants and public spaces to reduce obesity.
 - **EPODE (Together Let's Prevent Childhood Obesity):** A methodology involving local stakeholders in a prevention program to facilitate healthier lifestyles. Started in 2003, EPODE now reaches nearly 1.8 million inhabitants in 167 French cities, 20 cities in Spain, and 8 cities in Belgium.
 - **French Soda Tax (2018):** An updated sugar tax with a graduated structure, where drinks with higher sugar content face higher levies. Effective January 1, 2018, this tax applies to soft drinks, energy drinks, and flavored waters with added sugars or sweeteners, aiming to reduce consumption and promote healthier choices.
 - **Ban on Vending Machines in Schools (2005):** Implemented in all middle and secondary schools to reduce the consumption of high-calorie, low-nutrient snacks. The ban led to a 10-gram reduction in sugar intake from morning snacks at school and a significant reduction in the frequency of these snacks.
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5. China (Obesity Rate: 8.28%)

China has implemented several policies and initiatives to combat obesity, focusing on nutritional education, physical activity, and promoting healthier lifestyles. Here are some key initiatives:

- **Health Gift Packs in Shanghai:** Shanghai has been distributing 'health gift packs' to all citizens for many years. These packs include dietary and nutritional knowledge booklets and tools such as salt-control spoons and oil-control jugs.
 - **Nutrient Content Lists:** Producers and retailers in China are required by law to provide a list of the nutrient content of pre-packaged food products, even in the absence of a nutrition or health claim. The rules define which nutrients must be listed and on what basis (e.g., per 100g/per serving).
 - **Sunshine Sports Program:** This policy mandates one hour of physical activity in schools every day to improve the intensity of physical activity and control childhood and adolescent obesity.
 - **Shandong Province Initiatives:** For key groups such as children, adolescents, the elderly, and workers, Shandong Province has implemented activities like daily 10,000-step walking challenges, recognition programs for weight management volunteers, and the promotion of workplace exercises during breaks.
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6. Sweden (Obesity Rate: 15.27%)

Sweden has implemented several policies and initiatives to combat obesity, focusing on regulating advertising, promoting physical activity, and ensuring nutritious school meals. Here are some key initiatives:

- **General Marketing Act:** This act includes a ban on any advertising targeted at children under 12 years old on national radio and TV before and during children's programs. According to European legislation, the ban only covers broadcasts originating in Sweden.
- **Workplace Incentives:** The Swedish tax system includes incentives such as tax relief or reimbursement to encourage employees to engage in physical activity funded by the employer, for example, gym memberships.
- **Education Act:** According to this act, compulsory (9-year) primary schools must provide lunch to every child, free of charge since 1997, and nutritious since 2011. Lunch currently consists of a hot meal, a salad buffet, bread, and a beverage.

7. Austria (Obesity Rate: 15.37%)

Austria has implemented several policies and initiatives to combat obesity, focusing on improving school nutrition, promoting physical activity, and supporting weight loss. Here are some key initiatives:

- **School Buffet:** The "unser Schulbuffet" initiative provides free onsite counseling to cafeteria owners to improve their food and drink offerings based on healthy nutrition guidelines. By the end of 2014, 25% of all school buffets in Austria participated, benefiting 240,000 pupils.
- **Moving Children Healthily (2009–2024):** Austria's largest exercise initiative for kindergartens and elementary schools, engaging 94% of primary schools and 77% of kindergartens at least once. Over 15 years, children's exercise hours increased from 300,000 to almost 4 million per school year.
- **Guidelines for Vending Machines:** The SIPCAN initiative provides recommendations for healthier vending machine products in schools. Schools and operators meeting the criteria receive a certificate indicating compliance with healthier product standards.
- **Schlank ohne Diät:** A free behavioral modification program offered by the Institute of Social Medicine Vienna and the Lower Austria health insurance company. Participants attend five group sessions to manage eating habits and increase physical activity. Among 1,899 participants, men lost an average of 6.7 kg and women 5.5 kg within eight weeks, with sustained weight loss of 4.8 kg at six- and twelve-month follow-ups.

8. Japan (Obesity Rate: 5.54%)

Japan has implemented several practices and cultural approaches to combat obesity, focusing on promoting physical activity, ensuring nutritional transparency, and maintaining a traditional diet. Here are some key initiatives:

- **Walk-to-School Practice:** While there is no national policy, it is common for local boards of education to mandate walking to school if the school is within a certain distance from the student's home. Other commuting methods, such as biking and school buses, are also considered based on geography, climate, and transport. Only 1.7% of Japanese children ride the bus to school, and children often walk in groups, unaccompanied by their parents. Japanese law requires elementary schools to be located within 2.5 miles of the children they serve.
- **Nutrient Content Lists:** Producers and retailers in Japan are required by law to provide a list of the nutrient content of pre-packaged food products, even in the absence of a nutrition or health claim. The rules define which nutrients must be listed and on what basis (e.g., per 100g/per serving).
- **Portion Control and Food Culture:** Japan's traditional Washoku diet emphasizes small portions, balanced meals, and nutrient-rich foods, including vegetables, fish, and fermented ingredients. This dietary approach naturally limits calorie intake while maximizing nutritional benefits, contributing to the country's low obesity rates.

9. South Korea (Obesity Rate: 7.33%)

South Korea has implemented several policies and initiatives to combat obesity, focusing on regulating advertising, ensuring nutritional transparency, and promoting healthier food options for children. Here are some key initiatives:

- **Special Act on the Safety Management of Children's Dietary Life:** This act includes policies to prevent obesity and improve children's diets. Article 10 prohibits TV advertising to children under 18 for specific food categories before, during, and after programs shown between 5pm–7pm and during other children's programs. The restriction also applies to advertising on TV, radio, and the internet that includes incentives to purchase, such as free toys. The act also sets nutrition standards for food sold on school premises and bans the sale of sugary drinks and other energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods.
- **Color-Coded Labelling for Children's Food:** The Special Act on Safety Control of Children's Dietary Life recommends color-coded labelling for pre-packaged children's favorite foods, such as cookies, candies, chocolates, dairy products, and fast food. The

labelling system uses green, amber, and red to indicate low, medium, or high levels of total sugars, fat, saturated fat, and sodium.

10. Philippines (Obesity Rate: 8.74%)

The Philippines has implemented several policies and initiatives to combat obesity, focusing on regulating unhealthy ingredients, promoting nutrition awareness, and imposing taxes on sugary drinks. Here are some key initiatives:

- **Mandatory National Ban on PHOs and Limit of Trans Fatty Acids:** The 2021 National Policy on the Elimination of Industrially Produced Trans-Fatty Acids mandates a national ban on partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs) and sets a 2% limit on trans fatty acids in oils and fats. This policy came into effect in 2023.
 - **Soft Drink Tax:** The Philippines imposes a tax of 6 pesos per liter on products using purely caloric and non-caloric sweeteners, and 12 pesos per liter on products using high fructose corn syrup with or without other sweeteners.
 - **Nutrition Month:** Held every July, Nutrition Month aims to raise awareness about the importance of nutrition among Filipinos. Established by Presidential Decree 491 (1974), the 2015 theme was "Timbang iwasto, sa tamang nutrisyon at ehersisyo" (Achieve normal weight through proper nutrition and physical activity), focusing on overweight and obesity issues.
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Conclusion

The fight against obesity requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach, integrating policy interventions, public health initiatives, and cultural dietary practices. The countries highlighted in this study demonstrate that effective regulatory frameworks, targeted taxation, consumer education, and community-driven programs can significantly contribute to healthier populations. While some nations benefit from traditional diets and active lifestyles, others have successfully implemented legislative measures to curb unhealthy food consumption and promote physical activity. Though these countries may not fully resolve the complex issue of obesity, they offer inspiration for global policymakers to take proactive steps in the fight against this growing health crisis. By selectively adapting their best practices, countries can begin addressing this critical healthcare issue, allowing for more focused efforts to resolve one challenge at a time.

Despite varying socioeconomic contexts, these nations exemplify strategic efforts to address obesity through sustainable and evidence-based policies. Their initiatives serve as a reference point for global health policymakers, emphasizing the need for contextually adapted solutions that balance nutrition security, food accessibility, and long-term public health outcomes. By leveraging these insights, governments worldwide can develop holistic strategies that foster healthier populations and reduce the burden of obesity-related diseases.

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