

Food wasting from free school meals practice in primary schools

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It is estimated that massive catering of institutions such as hospitals, military units and schools, generates significant amounts of food waste.

The generation of food waste during free school meals in Greek primary schools was examined by direct weighing for 5 consecutive days in two primary schools of the Municipality of **Halandri** in December 2023.

Measurements were conducted in two out of the four schools of **Halandri** that provide free school meals to the pupils that register for the specific service. A supplier, that is subcontracted from the Greek Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, provides daily a sealed portion of food per student along with sides and a fruit. The menu is designed according to the national nutritional guide.

The study quantified the food that is distributed to be consumed in school by children that stay until late (all day school) and the take-away portion, that means the food taken away from the pupils who leave at

midday. Validation and quantification of waste was feasible regarding consumption in school only.

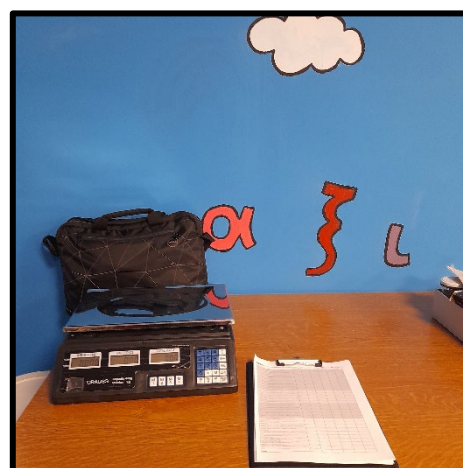
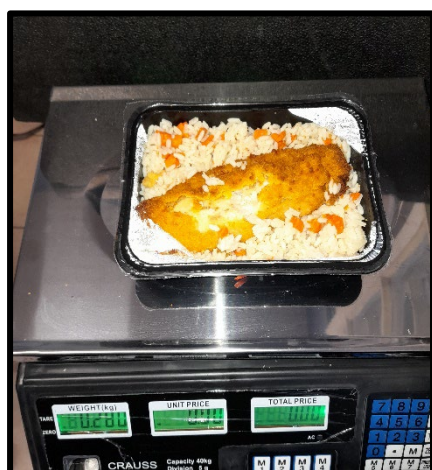
The individuals' behavior after leaving school was not monitored as its determination requires additional resources and may only be based on self-reporting.



The study findings show that the net weight of food distributed in the two schools was on the average 128 kg/day. Of it, **52%** was distributed to children who stay only until midday (taken away) and **48%** was distributed to children who stay all day.

Of this **48%**, the 31% of food portions were opened to be consumed, whereas the 17% were not opened. **26%** of the opened portions ended up as waste although it was all edible food. There is a multitude of reasons why this occurs, the main one being the rather unsatisfying taste and texture of the dishes. It remains uncertain what happens to almost half of the supplied school meals that are taken away. The very low food quantity that is actually consumed in the schools leaves little space for optimism. It is easily concluded that school meals are not sustainable as they are currently implemented.

The necessity to reexamine and redesign the practice is imperative if they are to serve as nutritional aid, instead of food waste generation hotspots as the research of **the Food Loss and Waste Prevention Unit of the Municipality of Halandri** has determined.



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