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RESEARCH TENDER CALL

TENDER INFORMATION DOCUMENT


Project Reference No.: 01-2025

Project Title: Creating healthy and supportive food environments – investigating the type, location and density of food outlets on the island of Ireland

1. Background

Over the last several decades, the global food environment has become increasingly obesogenic (Popkin et al 2012). The obesogenic environment is characterised by a global food system that produces more processed, affordable and effectively marketed food than ever before, interacting with local environmental factors to determine obesity prevalence (Swinburn et al 2011). Food environments are defined as the collective physical, economic, policy and socio-cultural surroundings, opportunities and conditions that influence people's food and beverage choices and nutritional status (Swinburn et al 2013). Unhealthy food environments lead to unhealthy diets and excess energy intake which have consequences in levels of morbidity and mortality (Harrington et al 2020). Recent research by SafeFood (2022) has shown a high level of public support for policies that shape food environments including restrictions on developing fast-food outlets near schools.

Food retail environments are increasingly considered influential in determining dietary behaviours and health outcomes. Ratings for Ireland in the recent Food-EPI report (Policies for Tackling Obesity and Creating Healthier Food Environments in Ireland) indicated that there was low implementation of policies for community food environments (e.g. availability and accessibility of food outlets) or consumer food environment (e.g. in-store availability and promotion of foods). The retail food environment has important implications for dietary intake and health, and dramatic changes in the retail food environment have been observed over the past few decades and years (Harrington et al 2020a, Harrington et al 2020b).

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A small number of studies on the island have included an interrogation of the relationship between the environment and dietary quality. Kelly et al (2019) reported that fast food environments around 63 post-primary schools throughout Ireland were associated with less fruit and vegetable intake. Keane et al. (2016) explored if distance to and the number of supermarkets and convenience stores in the local area around households was associated with dietary quality in a nationally representative sample of nine-year-olds in Ireland, while Layte et al (2011) examined the relationship between distance to and density of food outlets in a local area and dietary quality in a sample of adults in Ireland. More recently O'Mahony et al (2022) examined the availability of supermarkets in a geographical area in Dublin and identified a trend towards more supermarkets being located in more affluent areas. Dublin City Council has also mapped food retail in specific locations in the context of the draft Edible Dublin strategy (Gallagher et al 2024) while the Cork Food Policy Council commissioned the Cork Food Map as part of a larger, ongoing project to develop a complete profile of the food system in Cork to identify and address food-related issues affecting the people living in the region¹.

Neighbourhood food environments—the distribution, density and mix of accessible food outlets—are a recognised influence on what we eat, our body weight and health (Public Health England 2017). The current obesity policies on the island recognise the important role of planning in promoting and facilitating active and healthy living patterns for local communities. The policies specifically reference the importance of ensuring that exposure of children to the promotion of foods that are high in fat, salt or sugar is reduced such as the careful consideration of the appropriateness and location of fast-food outlets in the vicinity of schools and parks. It is based on these recommendations that this piece is being commissioned to ensure that the planners, policy makers and communities have access to up to date and robust evidence on the food environment in the communities where people live.

2. Objective/Knowledge Gap:

The food environment in which we live impacts what we eat - where we live, work, shop and learn - can affect the food we eat and how healthy we are. Obesity policies on the island of Ireland recognise the need for food environments that support and enable people to access healthy and

¹ <http://corkfoodpolicycouncil.com/the-cork-food-map/#:~:text=How%20is%20the%20Cork%20Food,socioeconomic%20areas%20in%20Cork%20City> accessed 1 July 2024.

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nutritious diets (Department of Health 2016, Department of Health 2012). There is a clear need to make data on the physical food environment available to people, planners and policy makers in a way that is accessible and relatable. This research is being commissioned to:

- Develop a robust and valid method to capture and visualise data on food outlets on the island of Ireland, using the WHO definition and examples² (World Health Organisation 2022).
- Relate food outlet data to aspects of the food environment such as area socio economic status data, food outlet location data, school location data, urban/rural location data.

3. Approach

It is proposed that the aims and objectives of the research are met by using a mixture of methods drawing on existing data when available. The research should ensure the generation of representative data presented in a visual such as mapping, but not limited to mapping, way that can be used by others in the future to monitor policy implementation and evaluate impact of initiatives to address the food environment as required.

Technical Specification


(a) Scope of research

- The primary goal of this research is to generate data on the type, density and location of food outlets on the island of Ireland. The data should also be made available in a visual format. This can involve a sampling methodology but should generate an appropriately representative data set on the island to ensure validity and robustness.

For the purpose of the research, food outlets include retail outlets such as supermarkets, convenience stores, and all those outlets that are considered to be out of home food environment which includes restaurants, cafés and bars; takeaways, and fast-food and street-food outlets;

² The out of home sector includes all food and beverage outlets where food and drink can be purchased and consumed outside the home, either on or off the premises. The sector can be accessed in both the physical and digital arenas. Examples of out of home outlets include:

- restaurants, cafés and bars;
- takeaways, and fast-food and street-food outlets;
- outlets in public transport stations;
- outlets in hospitality businesses (gyms, sports centres and hotels) and in entertainment and attraction venues (cinemas, theatres, arenas and theme parks);

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outlets in public transport stations; outlets in hospitality businesses (gyms, sports centres and hotels) and in entertainment and attraction venues (cinemas, theatres, arenas and theme parks); department stores and shopping centres; contract catering, such as workplace canteens, university/college/further education centres canteens, event catering and hospital visitor canteens (World Health Organisation 2022).

- The methodology should be informed by existing data sets e.g, the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme in Northern Ireland³ or other mechanisms such as Trade Effluent Fats, Oils and Grease Licences⁴ in Ireland
- The methodology should be informed by the approaches and methods used in other jurisdictions such as the Priority Places for Food Index⁵; the mapping of fast food outlets by local authority and area deprivation in England, Fast food outlets: density by local authority in England - GOV.UK⁶ (); the Food environment assessment tool⁷ (Feat) which enables detailed exploration of the geography of food retail access across England, Scotland and Wales and the USDA ERS - Food Environment Atlas ⁸ (together with existing protocols such as INFORMAS protocols⁹
- The data must be interrogated based on a number of parameters including
 - the different types of food outlets
 - the location and density of the outlet(s) relative to the socio economic status or deprivation as measured or determined using existing data sets such as the Pobal HP Deprivation Index <https://www.pobal.ie/pobal-hp-deprivation-index/> and the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 (NIMDM 2017) [NIMDM17-FAQs.pdf \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/nimdm17-faqs.pdf)
 - the location of the food outlet(s) relative to the units of measure used by the local authority for planning purposes
 - the location of the outlet(s) relative to education including schools, preschools and childcare settings, or other settings where children congregate such as sports and activity centres, play areas etc.

³ <https://ratings.food.gov.uk/open-data>

⁴ <https://www.water.ie/sites/default/files/docs/trade-effluent-forms/FOG-BK-06-2023.pdf>


⁵ <https://priorityplaces.cdrc.ac.uk/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fast-food-outlets-density-by-local-authority-in-england>

⁷ <https://www.mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk/resources/feat/>

⁸ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas>

⁹ <https://www.informas.org/protocols/>

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- The methodology should consider how any datasets generated are geocoded and developed in such a way that they can be used by others at a later date. The datasets should be visualised or mapped for ease of use and interrogation.
- The research should be collaborative across a number of relevant disciplines including public health, geographical information systems and nutrition and other relevant fields.

It should be noted that SafeFood is not an active participant in the project and sole responsibility lies with the successful tenderer.

(b) Literature review

A brief literature review, providing the rationale and full description of the methodology and approach should be provided.

(c) Methodology

A full justification and rationale for the proposed methodology and analytical approaches will be required. It will be necessary to indicate for all aspects of the project how the proposed data will be accessed, managed, analysed and reported.

(d) Analysis


Applicants should demonstrate how they will access existing data sets or generate data sets relating to food outlet locations and integrate these with existing data sets on area socio-economic profile, proximity to key settings for children and government-owned entities such as hospitals and sports centres, proximity to public transport routes and urban/rural location.

(e) Data handling and Reporting

The contractor will submit to SafeFood, on a six-monthly basis, an interim report containing details of the progress for each deliverable of the project.

The contractor is responsible for collating all results and a final report will be submitted to SafeFood on completion of the study.

All forms, documentation and electronic files must be retained by the contractor for SafeFood for a period of seven years in case of issues arising after the completion of the research.

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(f) Quality assurance

- Ethical approval will be an essential component where data collection from participants is involved.
- The contractor will use validated methods where applicable and will apply best practice quality controls to approaches.
- To ensure transparency and reproducibility, all data sources used in the research must be specified, and all data used must be explicitly specified and justified.
- SafeFood may visit the contractors during the course of the research to assess how the work is being carried out.

4. Proposed Activities/Deliverables


- A report and executive summary for publication to the SafeFood website.
- This data will form a baseline and be provided in a manner that can be used by others at a later date to inform policy, evaluate and assess impact of initiatives to address the food environment.
- An analysis of the relationship between the type, density and location of food outlets on the island of Ireland with domains such as area socio economic status data, school location data, urban/rural location data.
- Evidence to inform public health campaigns that support the public in understanding and navigating complex food environments.
- Dissemination of the report and findings to key stakeholders and audiences including policy makers, media, researchers, the public and members of the All-island Obesity Action forum members and other relevant audiences via a workshop or webinar.

5. Evaluation of Tenders

Quality of the proposal:

- ✓ Anticipated deliverables;
- ✓ Research method and facilities;
- ✓ Value for money;
- ✓ Potential for application;
- ✓ Work plan, including the overall timeframe.

Quality of Applicants:

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- ✓ Experience in subject area;
- ✓ Quality Assurance and Quality Control measures in place.

Please note that the successful applicant must sign a data processing agreement that will govern the processing of personal data as part of this project.

6. Duration of Project

This project will be 18 months duration.

7. Tender Application Forms and Guidelines

The Tender Application Form and associated Guidelines can be downloaded from <https://www.safefood.net/research>. They can also be obtained by emailing research@safefood.net, quoting the project reference number **01-2025**. Alternatively, please contact SafeFood as per the details below.

Ms. Gillian Fox
Research Coordinator
SafeFood
7 Eastgate Avenue
Little Island
Cork
T45 RXO1


Tel: + 3532304100

The closing date for receipt of applications by SafeFood is no later than **4pm Friday 20th June 2025**.

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