

HOME ECONOMICS IN EUROPEAN PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULA: A COMPARATIVE MAPPING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR END 2026

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Abstract

The SHAREE (STE(A)M for Home Economics and Research Exchange) project is a pan European collaborative project between Tallinn University, the University of Helsinki and Atlantic Technological University, Ireland. The project was awarded funding under the European Union's Horizon Europe widening participation and spreading excellence sub-programme. One of the key outputs of the SHAREE project was to research and map how the curricular subject Home Economics exists in European public school curricula. This work involved mapping countries where Home Economics is taught in public school systems and providing country-specific details regarding curriculum specification and topics based on findings related to existing international curricula, syllabi, and educational policy. A summary of that research output is shared in this paper and in the END Conference Oral Presentation. A full report on Home Economics in European Public School Curricula, with specific individual country breakdown, is also available to review (Nõmmik et al., 2025). The objective of this paper is to synthesise country-level curriculum positions and common topic emphases from the overall report to inform END Conference 2026. Documentary evidence regarding European Home Economics syllabi, national curricula, and education systems was collected in spring–summer 2025 laws, obtained by the researchers through online sources and local contacts. The collected information was analysed and synthesised thematically employing the unifying lens of the International Federation for Home Economics position statement (2008) as a frame. Outcomes indicate that Home Economics as a curricular subject is present (compulsory or elective; standalone or integrated) in 24 of 44 European public school systems reviewed; Nordic countries typically offer standalone, compulsory HE with strong sustainability/well-being orientation, while many Central/Eastern systems integrate HE into Technology/Design. Core topics which are commonly included in the curricular subject across countries/systems include food preparation, nutrition/health, consumer education, textiles, and household management, with some variability evident between curricula in depth of content treatment and emphasis. Despite structural differences, Home Economics Curricula across Europe consistently aim to build essential life skills and civic/sustainability competencies amongst students. Further future harmonisation of subject indicators and cross-country collaboration could serve to strengthen visibility, subject recognition and more strongly severe related policy enhancement.

Keywords: *Home economics, curriculum, mapping, Europe, life skills.*

1. Introduction

This paper presents an aspect of the work of the Horizon funded SHAREE project. Specifically, it presents a review of the curricular subject Home Economics as it exists in European public school curricula into a concise conference oral presentation and conference paper. The paper provides an overview of Home Economics across Europe, highlighting how countries position the subject (standalone, integrated, or limited), the student grades involved in undertaking the subject and the typical thematic topics studied within international subject curricula. The analysis employed the International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE) position statement (2008) and key subject domains as an analytical and organising frame. Finally, the paper presents key outcomes and implications for END Conference 2026 delegates and community.

2. Design and objectives

The research design for this aspect of the SHAREE project work involved comparative documentary analysis of 44 national/regional curricula. The key objectives of the research analysis were: (i) to map provision of HE in European public school curricula; (ii) to synthesise common curricular topic emphases in the subject; (iii) to surface emergent trends and challenges for the curricular subject Home Economics.

3. Methods

The SHAREE project Team led by Tallinn University and assisted by partners from the University of Helsinki and Atlantic Technological University sourced and collated information regarding national curricula, Home Economics syllabi, and subject content across Europe. Europe consists of 51 independent states. This study includes 44 of them; transcontinental countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkey) are excluded as well as those geographically located in West Asia (e.g., Armenia). The information was largely obtained via public portals and through liaison with expert professional contacts. The information collation and sourcing took place during the period Spring–Summer 2025. Collated information was coded with alignment to the subject domains identified in the IFHE position paper (2008) and the domains included: food, nutrition/health; food science/hospitality; consumer studies; textiles/clothing; design/technology; household management; housing/shelter; human development/family studies; community services, with the theme food culture/etiquette added as an additional category in the analysis. Scope notes were recorded per country identifying the subject as compulsory vs elective, standalone vs integrated and recording the typical grades/ages within which the subject was undertaken by students. Results were reviewed, checked and verified by partners.

4. Results / outcomes and discussion

Home Economics education is offered in 24 of 44 European public school systems reviewed. The SHAREE mapping study indicated that Home Economics is provided as a standalone or independent compulsory subject in 9 European countries including Denmark (Madkundskab), Finland (Kotitalous), Greece (Οικιακής Οικονομίας), Malta (Home Economics), North Macedonia (Life Skills), Norway (Mat og Helse), Slovenia (Gospodinjstvo), Sweden (Hem- och konsumentkunskap), Switzerland (Wirtschaft, Arbeit, Haushalt). In a further 12 European countries Home Economics is available in the curriculum as an integrated compulsory model or offered as a combined compulsory curriculum subject. Examples of this positioning include Home Economics within Technology/Design/Arts (e.g., Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, United Kingdom). In a further three European countries Home Economics is available as a limited compulsory or elective subject as is the case for example in Austria, Germany and Ireland.

4.1. Provision landscape

The mapping results show that Home Economics is a compulsory or an elective subject in public education in the identified 24 European countries, although its visibility, pervasiveness and role in the curriculum varies considerably. In some countries, such as Denmark, Finland, Greece, Malta, North Macedonia, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, and Switzerland, Home Economics is offered as an independent compulsory subject. In others, including Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom, it is integrated into broader compulsory subjects, such as technology, design or arts and crafts. In Austria, Germany, and Ireland, Home Economics teaching is limited to some students as it is dependent on school type or the school's decisions or the subject is offered in an elective or optional capacity and is therefore only selected for study by some students. Further details of each specific country mapping and provision type is detailed in the full report (Nõmmik et al., 2025).

4.2. Scope and content of the public school subject home economics

The scope and content of the subject Home Economics also differ quite significantly between countries with some overall consistency in content topics included and key variances described further in this section. The IFHE position statement (2008) provides a broad framework for the subject Home Economics, which may include such trans-disciplinary component areas such as food, nutrition and health; food science and hospitality; consumer studies and consumer science; textiles and clothing; design and technology; household management; housing and shelter; human development and family studies; and community services. This widely accepted overarching discipline definition and identified composition

themes therefore served as a starting point for the curriculum analysis undertaken in this research. While IFHE defines the general scope of the field, it is evident that in national curricula design each state may further adapt selected curricular content to reflect individual local needs and historical traditions as well as the education stage / level in question. In addition to the IFHE themes, the analysis of the curricula gathered highlighted the common inclusion of topics (in this instance specifically food culture and etiquette) which were therefore added to the thematic list for this project. It is essential to acknowledge that curriculum development is the outcome of a long and complex process, with each country following its own trajectory. This study presents the current situation without underestimating or overlooking the selection choices made in curriculum development at the national level.

Food, nutrition and health are universally present in the curricula explored, often with strong practical components e.g., food preparation. Many systems additionally include consumer education (financial literacy, budgeting, advertising/media literacy), textiles/clothing (from care/repair to garment making), and household management (planning, cleaning, safe appliance use). Food culture/etiquette and sustainability (waste reduction, local/seasonal foods, responsible consumption) are commonly included, with variable depths of treatment evident. Some systems include such topics as housing/shelter and family studies; with community service links (gardens, markets) appearing less frequently. Based on the analysis, the topics focused on contemporary home economics education in European countries are further delineated in some detail below, sequenced to reflect everyday life, from basic needs, such as food and health, to broader areas, such as family, community and citizenship.

4.2.1. Food, nutrition and health. As evident in the curricula, throughout Europe, food education is a key focus within the curricular subject Home Economics. This topic includes elements such as teaching practical skills; learning how to prepare meals, awareness of hygiene and safety guidelines; and understanding balanced and healthy nutrition. It is evident from the analysis that all European countries address this Home Economics component topic, although the depth of treatment does vary. Some curricula strongly emphasise nutritional science and health promotion, while others focus on and devote more time to development of students' practical cooking skills. As practical application and life skills development is at the centre of Home Economics education, the reviewing of the presence of food preparation in Home Economics education was a key starting point for this study, therefore, the topic 'food' was renamed 'food preparation' in the presentation of the results.

4.2.2. Food culture and etiquette. Food traditions and cultural heritage also emerged as integral parts of the subject Home Economics in European curricula. National curricula often included local food cultures, seasonal eating practices, festive meals and the social aspects of dining. A focus on etiquette, table manners and shared meals may promote equality, cooperation and respect in both family and community contexts.

4.2.3. Food science. Food science content evident in European syllabi/curriculum analysis focused mainly on the natural-scientific processes behind food preparation and quality. Students may learn about nutrients, how cooking changes food and how preservation methods keep food safe. The curricula of some European countries include simple food science experiments, such as testing how different cooking methods may affect food taste or texture. Whilst not every country emphasises food science content, those that do connect it to broader food related matters, such as public health, innovations in food technology and food sustainability.

4.2.4. Consumerism and consumer science. The extent to which consumer-related topics are included in curricula across Europe varies among countries reviewed. In some countries, consumer education is emphasised more, with a focus on financial literacy, budgeting, consumer rights and the critical evaluation of advertising and media. In other curricula, consumer education is more implicit and often integrated through a focus on food choices, textile use or sustainability projects. Where present, the overarching aim of consumer-focused content is to enable students to make informed, ethical and sustainable decisions in their everyday lives.

4.2.5. Textiles and clothing. In many European countries the topics of textiles and clothing care are represented as part of Home Economics curricula, including the teaching of skills such as sewing, embroidery, garment making and textile care. Some Home Economics curricula also integrate related topics such as fashion design, garment sustainability and the critical analysis of global textile production. In other countries, however, content on textiles and clothing is only marginally included or is not evident at all as a topic in the subject Home Economics. This omission may be related to the fact that such topics are taught within other curricular subjects in that jurisdiction, for example, in crafts education. This variance may reflect different national priorities or legacies in Home Economics education across Europe.

4.2.6. Household management. The topic or theme of household management in the studied curricula focuses mainly on content related to running a household effectively and may include aspects such as cleaning, organising, budgeting, time management and the safe use of appliances. Some countries give this theme prominence when teaching Home Economics, broadly treating household management as an essential life skill, while in other countries, the focus relates only to practical maintenance tasks or this topic is perhaps omitted altogether, reflecting different understandings and evolution of the role of household management knowledge in contemporary education/curricula.

4.2.7. Housing and shelter. Although less common in the overall mapping, some Home Economics curricula include lessons on planning living spaces (for example, interior decoration and ergonomics). This focus connects creative skills with well-being and sustainability, showing how physical environments may affect quality of life for individuals and families. While it is not currently a dominant emerging theme, increased contemporary debates on sustainable housing and eco-friendly design could give this theme more prominence in the future.

4.2.8. Human development and family studies. This curricular area, where present in Home Economics, focuses on personal growth, family life and social relationships. Students may learn about equality in household chores, family roles or respectful communication. However, such content is less prevalent in European Home Economics curricula compared with other content areas such as food and consumer education. This may be related to the fact that similar topics are also included in other, independent subjects, for example, in humanities, life skills or health education curricula.

4.2.9. Community services. The mapping undertaken indicated that some European countries extend Home Economics discipline content beyond the household into community life. Examples of focus areas emerging in this review include content related to, for example, school gardens, local sustainability projects and student-run markets. This topic however, is underrepresented in curricula overall; however, where present, it serves to connect personal skills with civic engagement.

4.3. Emerging trends and future perspectives

The findings of this SHAREE Home Economics in European Public School Curricula comparative mapping study highlight quite a varied landscape in Home Economics education across Europe, with countries often adopting different philosophical and practical approaches. Broadly speaking, in Nordic countries, such as Finland, Norway and Sweden, Home Economics education places strong emphasis on sustainability, well-being and civic education, while in Central Europe, as particularly evident in Germany and Austria, the curricular focus leans more towards practical household and food-related skills. Elsewhere, for instance, in Latvia and Lithuania, Home Economics is often combined with technology, design or food science, with a strong orientation towards practical cooking, creativity and food culture.

Despite these above-mentioned national variations, curricula across Europe consistently frame Home Economics as a curricular subject that equips students with essential life skills which promote independence, responsibility and well-being. Beyond preparing learners for everyday household tasks, the subject Home Economics cultivates students' ability to make informed, ethical and sustainable choices in relation to food, textiles and clothing, consumer choices and the environment.

Several common trends emerge in the aims of Home Economics education across Europe via the curriculum mapping undertaken. It is evident that emphasis is placed on the relevance of selected Home Economics topics to everyday life, linking theoretical knowledge to practical competencies in nutrition, health, consumer education and household management. This is closely tied to a strong and pervasive curricular focus on sustainability and well-being, preparing students to act responsibly in ecological, economic and social contexts. Home Economics curricula also commonly highlight the development of transferable competencies, such as problem-solving, critical and creative thinking, collaboration and decision-making, through hands-on, action-oriented and project-based learning. Evidently, the subject's transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary character, which integrates natural, social, human and cultural sciences, positions it as a bridge between theory and everyday practice. Many of the Home Economics curricula explored emphasise the role of Home Economics in fostering responsible, active citizenship by helping students develop personal responsibility, social awareness and self-reflection along with learning practical skills.

Several European curricula explicitly connect Home Economics with technological and entrepreneurial competencies, emphasising innovation, design processes and links to industries, such as food, textiles and tourism. Less frequently, but sometimes highlighted, in European curricula/syllabi is the cultural dimension of Home Economics, which focuses on national culinary traditions while encouraging openness to, for example, global food cultures or cultural influences on other aspects of the subject. In some

contexts, the subject carries a strong vocational orientation, preparing students directly for labour market opportunities. These differences illustrate that while European Home Economics curricula share an interest in sustainability, well-being and life skills, the curricula reviewed also reflect distinct cultural, economic and educational priorities in different countries.

Sustainability and well-being are at the core of contemporary Home Economics education and are explicitly embedded in national curricula reviewed in this study as also reinforced in the IFHE Position Statement (2008). Sustainability is framed as supporting optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities while recognising the interconnectedness of various sectors at the local and global levels. With its interdisciplinary breadth, as evident in the mapping, the subject Home Economics has the potential to shape these systems and contribute to sustainable futures. Equally central to Home Economics is the emphasis on well-being, which addresses the everyday needs and concerns of individuals and families, highlighting their significance not only in immediate contexts but also within broader societal and global frameworks. By integrating content on sustainability and well-being, Home Economics education enhances its global relevance and provides learners with tools to navigate a rapidly evolving world. This curriculum mapping study indicates that these themes are already evident in European Home Economics curricula and are expected to gain even further prominence in the future.

Ultimately, the diversity within Home Economics curricula, as emergent in the mapping undertaken and as delineated in this paper, combined with a commitment to sustainable and optimal living, positions the curricular subject Home Economics to influence broad sectors of European society by addressing and transforming political, social, cultural, ecological, economic and technological systems at both the local and global levels.

5. Conclusions

Home Economics education is offered in 24 of 44 European public school systems reviewed and reliably contributes to development of essential life skills, food preparation, sustainability, well-being and citizenship. There is the potential that further strategic collaboration across countries and increased consistency in curricular metrics could further enhance policy traction and lead to more equitable subject provision in Europe. Across contexts, Home Economics evidently acts as a bridge between theory and everyday practice, and current curriculum variability may arise to reflect national priorities, governance (central vs local), as well as historical traditions. For example, Nordic systems foreground sustainability, well-being, and civic competencies via hands-on Home Economics skills, whilst Central/Eastern models emphasise integration with Technology/Design and development of practical household skills. The somewhat inconsistent visibility and nomenclature associated with the subject in some jurisdictions (Home Economics, Food and Health, Technology, etc.), alongside the incomparable time-allocation for the subject and some state/school-level discretion, may contribute to inequities in Home Economics curricula access. There may be potential opportunities in future to further align Home Economics curricula with topic domains agreed in the IFHE position statement (2008) while still adapting public school curricula locally. There may also be potential to further strengthen sustainability and consumer literacy content in Home Economics curricula across European countries and to further develop curricula subject impact on public health, well-being, and responsible consumption. Alongside further development or alignment of existing curricula there is the potential to explore

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