

Changes in children’s intakes and sources of free sugars since 1997.

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Background

Meeting the new target for free sugars (FS) intake (<5% energy) is highly challenging. Current FS intakes among children and adolescents are three times this level. A better understanding of sources and trends in intake may help in designing more effective strategies for FS reduction.

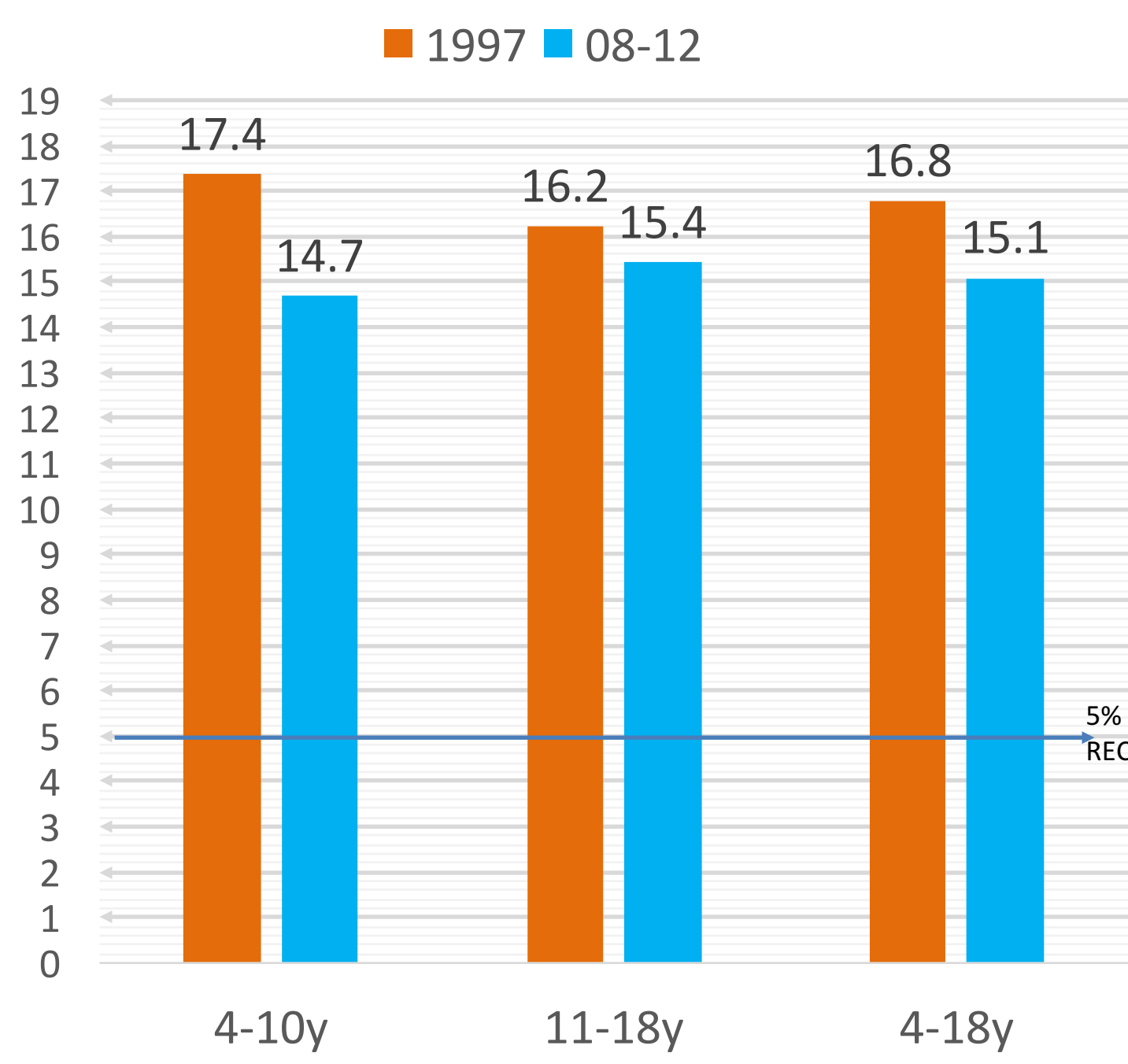
Methods

Using original dietary records, FS intakes and sources among children aged 4-18 y were compared between the 1997 NDNS (n1688) and rolling programme NDNS 2008-2012 (n1687). 7-day weighed records were used in 1997, 4-day estimated records in 2008-2012. Non-milk extrinsic sugars (NMES) was used as proxy for free sugars (FS). Means were compared using non-parametric tests.

Results 1: FS intakes

- FS intake fell between 1997 and 2008-2012 (P<0.001).
- The fall was greater among 4-10y olds than among 11-18y olds.
- Absolute intake of FS fell to 60.9g among 4-10y and to 74.6g among 11-18y olds
- Recommended FS intakes are no more than 19g/d for 4-6y, 24g/day for 7-10y, and 30g for 11-18y

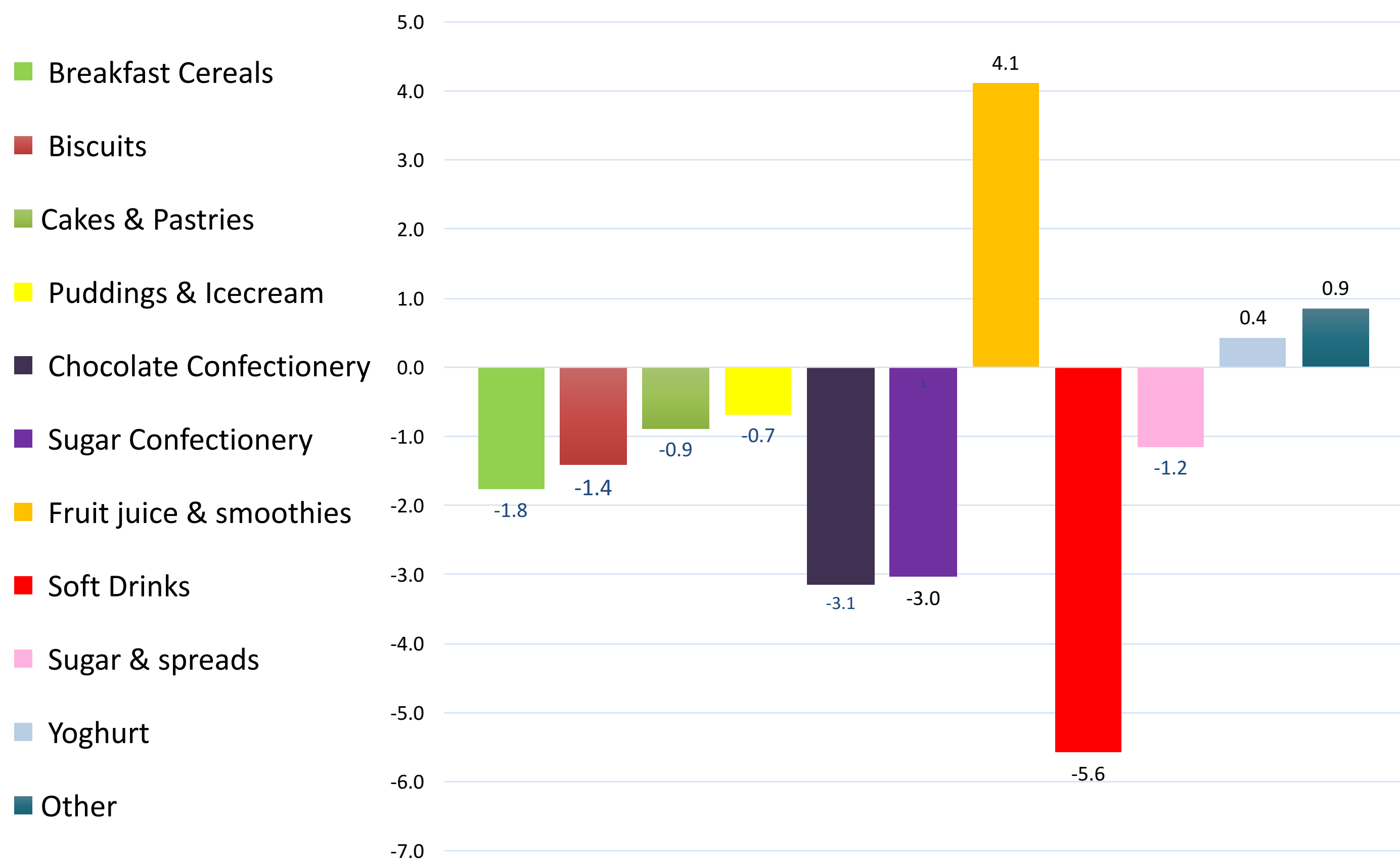
Change in FS (% energy) between 1997 and 2008-2012



Results 3: change in sources according to age group

- Many foods contributed to the reduction in FS, but among 4-10year olds **confectionery** (-6.1g FS) and **soft drinks** (-5.6g FS) were the categories that fell most, partly offset by an increase in **fruit juice** consumption (+4.1g) and **other foods** (+0.9g).
- By contrast, among 11-18y olds there was a small *increase* in sugar from **soft drinks** (+1.4g), as well as from **fruit juice** (+2.5g), and other foods (+1.9g). There were decreases in FS from **confectionery** (-5.8g), **table sugar and spreads** (-2.5g) and **cakes** (-2.0g).

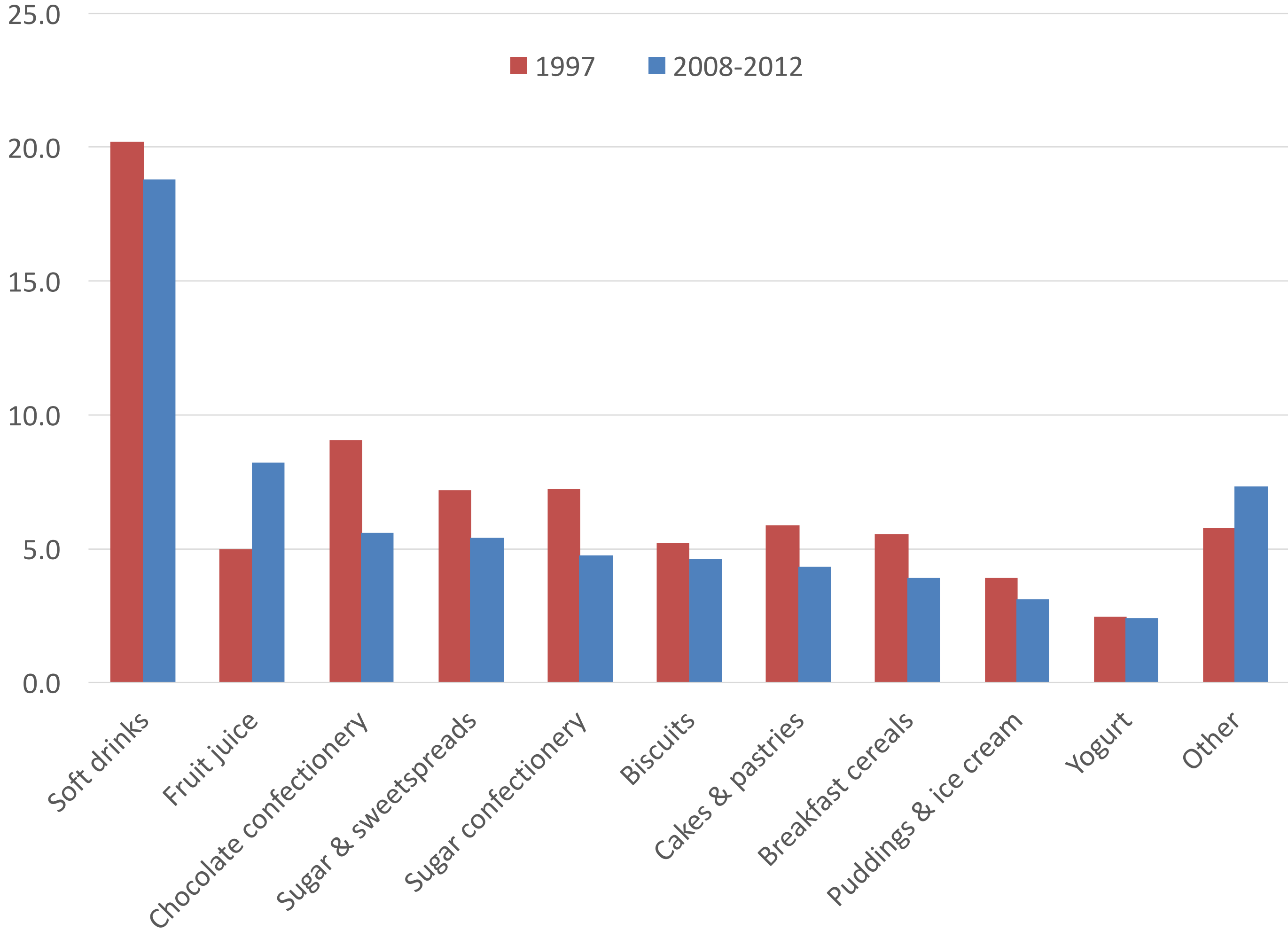
Change in FS g/d between 1997 and 2008-2012 among 4-10y



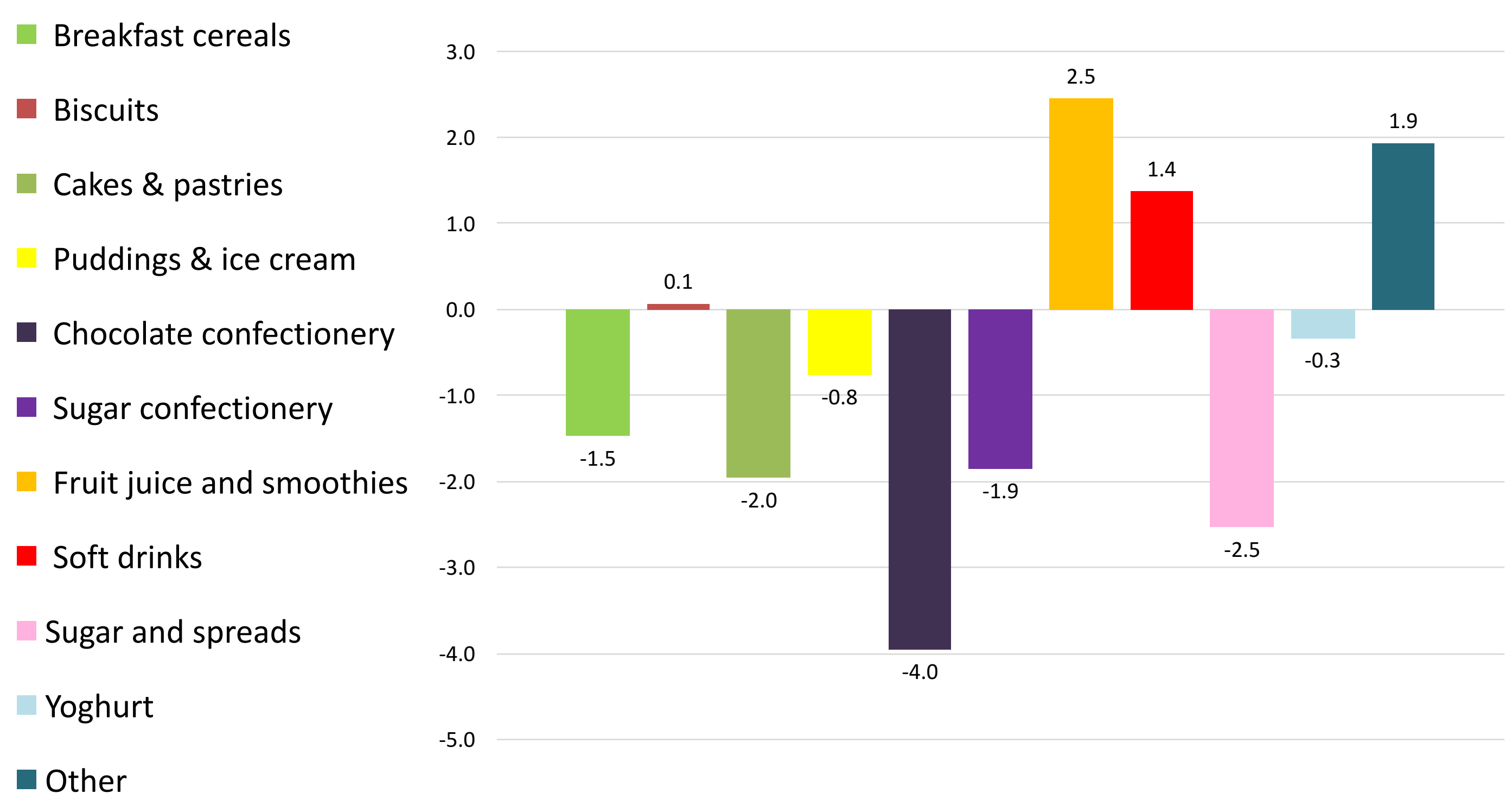
Results 2: sources of FS

The fall in FS intakes was attributable to many foods, including soft drinks, confectionery, table sugar, biscuits and cakes and breakfast cereals, partly offset by higher contributions from fruit juice and “other” foods (e.g. sauces, soup, bread, fruit, milk products).

Sources of free sugars (g/d NMES) among 4-18y



Change in FS (g/d) between 1997 and 2008-2012 among 11-18y



Results : achieving targets

Switching or eliminating 100% of all sugary soft drinks and reducing the FS contribution from all other sources by 50% would reduce mean FS intake to 25g/d in both age groups (4-10y and 11-18y). This represents a huge change in habits and food composition which would still leave younger children above their recommended intake.

Conclusion

FS intakes remain high among children and adolescents and the 5% FS target looks unachievable on the current trajectory. To make progress, a combination of strategies is needed, but modifying soft drink composition and/or consumption still presents the best opportunity to reduce FS intakes without adversely affecting diet quality. For obesity prevention, smaller portion sizes and/or reduced consumption frequency of energy-dense sugary food and drinks are also needed to help limit energy intake. However the focus on reducing FS should be given in the context of general advice on how to ensure a nutritionally adequate diet and a healthy lifestyle.