NOTE

Extract from EASA's Policy newsletter July/ August 2023

Obesity & HFSS advertising: flurry of calls for further restrictions

An exploratory Opinion looking into possible measures to reduce child obesity, prepared by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) at the request of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, was published on 13 July. The Spanish rapporteur, Josep Puxeu Rocamora, used to work as an industry representative of the food and beverage industry until 2022.

In its paragraph 1.5, the EESC argues that most national restrictions on the advertising of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children are too weak to protect children and existing voluntary approaches are insufficient. The Opinion looks at the WHO's nutrient profile model as a possible basis for limiting advertising of HFSS products, while also stressing the importance of learning from good measures and practices from countries that demonstrate the effectiveness of certain policies. The Opinion also reminds that the WHO advocates restricting all relevant forms of food advertising aimed at children.

Another July publication on HFSS is the WHO/UNICEF new toolkit to support governments in implementing mandatory policies to restrict the food marketing children are exposed to. Self-regulatory measures are described as ineffective to protect children from the impact of food marketing and are therefore not included as part of the restrictions recommended. This step-by-step guidance even suggests canned "counter-arguments" to the claim that "self-regulatory pledges are more efficient and less costly than the imposition of government-led restrictions". WHO/Europe has also recently created an AI-driven tool against online promotion of unhealthy products, in which consumers seemed invited to flag ads promoting products that could negatively impact children.

Finally, EASA also knows from a reliable source that the European Commission has tasked the European Audiovisual Observatory to deliver a report on HFSS marketing in 2024. EASA keeps close contacts with the Observatory.