

INTRODUCTION TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

In May 2010, 193 Member States of the World Health Assembly unanimously adopted the World Health Organization set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children (the WHO Recommendations). These recommendations urge Member States to reduce the impact on children of the marketing of unhealthy food which are high in fat, sugar and salt that tend to be highly processed, nutritiously poor and whose consumption contributes to childhood obesity (referred to as unhealthy food throughout this Issue). However, despite unequivocal evidence that unhealthy food marketing is associated with childhood obesity and the repeated commitments of Member States to halt the rise of childhood obesity by 2025, the implementation of the WHO Recommendations has been relatively poor in all regions of the world, including the European Union (EU).

Childhood obesity rates have been growing in the EU, and which have been accompanied by significant socio-economic costs and increased health inequalities. Ten years after the EU adopted a White Paper laying down *A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues*, this Special Issue proposes to reflect on the significance of the WHO Recommendations for the EU and its Member States, and the state of their implementation at national and regional levels. Its publication is all the more timely as it comes exactly one year after the World Health Assembly welcomed the final report of the WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity, which specifically noted the importance for States of implementing the WHO Recommendations as part of effective obesity prevention strategies. The EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity 2014-2020 is undergoing a mid-term review, whilst Directive 2010/13 on audiovisual media services is being revised. The question of how the EU and its Member States should regulate the marketing of unhealthy food to children has never been as pressing as it is now.

After a brief contribution introducing the WHO Recommendations (A. Garde and G. Xuereb), this Special Issue reflects on the state of evidence linking unhealthy food marketing to childhood obesity (E. Boyland and M. Tatlow-Golden). It then addresses two overarching themes, which the WHO Recommendations highlight as particularly important and for which the EU provides an excellent case study: firstly, the vexed issue of the extent to which the food and advertising industries should be seen as fully-fledged obesity prevention policy actors and be entrusted with the adoption of self-regulatory standards (A. Garde, B. Jefferey and N. Rigby); and secondly, the issue of the extent to which the EU should, as a supranational legal order, regulate unhealthy food marketing to children and support its Member States' international commitments to implement the WHO Recommendations (O. Bartlett and A. Garde). The Special Issue then focuses on five country case studies: the United Kingdom (A. Garde, S. Davies and J. Landon); Denmark and Sweden (K. Ó' Cathaoir); France (M. Friant-Perrot, A. Garde and A. Chansay); and Norway (M. Vaale-Hallberg and H. Bjøralt Roald). It concludes with a reflection on how children's rights could provide a useful tool to support the implementation of the WHO Recommendations in the EU (A. Garde, S. Byrne, N. Gokani and B. Murphy). This Special Issue does not purport to be exhaustive of relevant issues or country case studies. It is hoped that it nonetheless provides a useful analysis of how unhealthy food marketing has been regulated as part of national and EU obesity prevention strategies, and the difficulties that the implementation of the WHO Recommendations have raised in Europe.

Even though the publication of this Special Issue is particularly timely, I should confess that it has been in the making for longer than we ever anticipated. A series of circumstances led to its postponement. I would therefore like to thank all the contributors who embarked on this project with me back in 2014, as well as the contributors who joined us along the way. It has been both a pleasure and a privilege to work with them all. Special thanks for his Foreword go to Gerard Hastings, a friend and pioneering figure who has advocated for the regulation of unhealthy food marketing to children for years. I am particularly grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council who gave me the necessary space to work exclusively for a year on the marketing of food to children. During this time, I was able to spend six months at the WHO in Geneva and Cairo on the implementation of the WHO Recommendations, before I organised a workshop in London on the regulation of food marketing (Grant ES/J020761). Last but not least, I would like to thank the European Journal of Risk Regulation, and in particular its Founder and Editor in Chief Alberto Alemanno for devoting an entire Special Issue to the question of unhealthy food marketing, and its Managing Editor Cliff Wirajendi for his infinite patience and support.

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