

Cardiovascular Plan falls short of protecting public health, time for a UPF tax

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SAFE Food Advocacy Europe – an independent European consumer organisation working for consumer protection in the food sector, calls for comprehensive taxation measures for ultra-processed foods (UPFs) under the Cardiovascular Health Plan, presented today.

SAFE is disappointed that the current proposal refuses to put forward any mandatory taxes or levies, limiting its scope to potential voluntary coordination between member states.

Two weeks ago, SAFE sent a letter to the European Commission recommending measures that incentivise the reformulation of UPF products at industry level, based on the UK's approach towards sugar-sweetened beverages.

SAFE's Secretary General Floriana Cimmarusti said: "Several scientific studies have shown that ultra-processed foods have a clear negative health impact, increasing risks of non-communicable diseases, including cardio-vascular diseases. Limiting action voluntary or industry-led initiatives is definitely falls short to address this problem."

SAFE is saddened that the proposal refers to UPFs as "so-called ultra-processed foods", in particular.

Cimmarusti said: "I am very surprised to read certain passages like the one recommending a reduction in the consumption of sugar, saturated fats and salt 'when they have a negative impact on health and when consumed disproportionately'. This is the exact opposite of the principle of precaution, supposedly underlying this piece of legislation".

Deputy Director Luigi Tozzi said: "This proposal keeps us away from finding a solution to a real public health problem. It is time for the European Commission to explore measures in the form of taxes, not targeting consumers, especially the most vulnerable. They must target producers or importers, when the final product exceeds certain thresholds for ingredients and additives commonly associated

with UPFs and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Cardiovascular diseases are the number one death cause in the EU and diet is one of their main drivers.”

This approach specifically avoids taxing the end consumer, which would only add additional pressure on the most vulnerable. Several studies, including some by DG EMPLOY, indicate that economic vulnerability is associated with higher consumption of lower-cost, lower-quality foods, a substantial portion of which are ultra-processed.

The system has yielded quick results in the UK, achieving a 30% drop in sugar in the composition of sweet beverages between 2015 and 2018. SAFE believes that this strategy would provide a fair and effective tool to support European consumers, particularly those most exposed to purchasing products contributing to NCDs.

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