

PRESS RELEASE

SAFE makes the case for stricter rules on UPFs at industry-led conference

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SAFE's Deputy Director, Luigi Tozzi, called for strong measures to protect consumers against the negative health impacts of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) at the Food Drink Partnership Days 2026, organised by the European food and drink industry in Brussels.

Tozzi stressed that the public concern about UPFs is legitimate and based on scientific evidence.

Tozzi said: "Consumers' growing concern about ultra-processed foods is not irrational. It is legitimate, fact-based, and supported by major institutions like the WHO or FAO, which have repeatedly highlighted the link between UPF consumption and higher risks of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and other chronic conditions. Many observational studies and Randomised Control Trials provide sufficient evidence to encourage political action in the name of public health."

The three-day event has been organised by FoodDrinkEurope, the main lobby of European food industry, representing over 310,000 enterprises. SAFE challenged the industry's argument that ingredients and nutrients are the only relevant health aspect of UPFs, and shared data from the Moli-sani study, analysing health outcomes throughout 15 years in Italy.

Tozzi said: "The problem with UPFs is not only ingredients and nutrients. The processing is just as important, because it modifies the structure of those ingredients. But, beyond that, the most problematic aspect is that UPFs are designed for overconsumption, contributing to higher energy intake in diets. This is why we must take action to reduce the levels of UPF consumption among the public, especially among children and vulnerable groups".

SAFE calls for restrictions on UPF marketing directed at children, front-of-pack labelling with processing information, and the active promotion of minimally processed foods at the EU level.

The Moli-sani study is a cohort study aiming at evaluating the risk factors — environmental, genetics, biomolecular — linked to chronic-degenerative disease. Its findings indicate that individuals with the highest intake of ultra-processed foods faced a 59% higher relative risk of cancer-related mortality compared to those with limited intake.