

Study on health impact of UPFs must consider 15 years of global scientific evidence

In the context of the upcoming study on the health impacts of ultra-processed foods (UPFs), commissioned by DG SANTE of the European Commission, SAFE calls for maximum transparency about the scientific sources used, to avoid interference from the food industry. The study has been commissioned to the Scientific Advice Mechanism, surprisingly, without public disclosure of the composition of the panel.

SAFE fully supports the NOVA classification and is concerned that the study could undermine the overwhelming scientific evidence linking Group 4 ultra-processed foods to a broad range of diseases.

Deputy Director Luigi Tozzi said: “The negative effects of ultra-processed foods are not a myth; they are a scientific fact, backed by 15 years of evidence. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have validated the connection between NOVA Group 4 ultra-processed foods and poor health outcomes. The Commission’s study must acknowledge this simple fact. Shifting the discussion to other aspects like labelling is a pure distraction which disregards 15 years of global scientific studies”.

SAFE believes that mandatory labelling requirements would be costly and difficult to implement. Instead, SAFE proposes taxing sugar and the additives used by food industry in foods and beverages, to encourage reformulation, based on the system implemented in the UK for sweetened beverages a decade ago.

Special attention should be paid to combatting purely cosmetic reformulation, like adding fibers after the processing, as opposed to naturally occurring fibers, like those found in fresh fruits and vegetables, which are the ones recommended in the dietary guidelines everywhere in the world.