

## Press release

EMBARGO 00.01am Thursday 27th September 2012

### **Junk food advertising to kids: Self-regulation is failing across Europe**

London, 27 September 2012:

Advertising of junk food continues to undermine children's health despite the food industry's promises that they would restrict their marketing activities, according to a new report *A Junk-Free Childhood 2012: Marketing foods and beverages to children in Europe* published today by the International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO).

The review of advertising in Europe undertaken by IASO, a not-for-profit organisation, found that the industry's own figures show that children's exposure to advertisements for fatty and sugary foods had fallen by barely a quarter over the last six years.

The report's author, Dr Tim Lobstein, said "The food and beverage companies were told in 2004 by the then European Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou that they must cut their advertising to children or face regulation. The figures show that self-regulation achieved only a 29% fall in children's exposure, which is deeply disappointing. Exposure is now creeping up again in some countries."

"The problem is made worse because the companies are allowed to set their own standards for what they consider 'junk food' and they set the bar too low," said Dr Lobstein. "Our report found over 30 fatty and sugary foods which are classified as unhealthy in government-approved schemes across Europe and the USA but which are considered healthy by the manufacturers and which they allow themselves to advertise."

He said "Each company came up with its own definitions of what and how it will advertise, which it uses to its own advantage. No-one understands all the definitions and no-one can monitor them effectively. This anarchy might suit the companies, but it means that children remain exposed to advertising which encourages them to eat a junk food diet."

"Self-regulation simply does not work in a highly competitive marketplace," said Dr Lobstein. "Asking the companies to restrict their own marketing is like asking a burglar to fix the locks on your front door. They will say you are protected, but you are not."

Proposals being debated in Norway this month suggest that all advertising of junk food which targets anyone under age 18 should be restricted by law. "Children have a champion in Norway," said Dr Lobstein. "We want this high level of protection applied across Europe."

**Contact:** The International Association for the Study of Obesity, 12 Roger Street, London WC1N 2JU  
Tel +44 (0) 207 685 2580 [www.iaso.org](http://www.iaso.org)  
Dr Tim Lobstein +44 (0) 685 2583, Mobile +44 (0) 7590 223971

## Notes

1. The report: *A Junk-Free Childhood 2012: Marketing foods and beverages to children in Europe* is available at [http://www.iaso.org/site\\_media/uploads/A\\_Junk-free\\_Childhood\\_2012.pdf](http://www.iaso.org/site_media/uploads/A_Junk-free_Childhood_2012.pdf)

### *Children's reduced exposure to advertisements for EU Pledge non-compliant products (specified by the manufacturer)*

Number of impacts (in millions) and percentage change from first quarter 2005 to first quarter 2011, for children's exposure during all programming.

Source: *EU Pledge 2011 Monitoring Report*. <http://www.eu-pledge.eu/content/annual-reports>

	<b>2005 Q1</b>	<b>2011 Q1</b>	<b>Change</b>
France	1,031	673	- 35 %
Ireland	58	32	- 45 %
Netherlands	111	153	+ 38 %
Poland	1,618	1,018	- 37 %
Portugal	264	199	- 25 %
Romania	462	434	- 6 %
Slovenia	23	29	+ 26 %
<b>All countries reported</b>	<b>3,567</b>	<b>2,538</b>	<b>- 29 %</b>

2. The report is part of the StanMark Project which aims to promote responsible standards for marketing food and beverages to children. Further details of the StanMark project is available at <http://www.iaso.org/policy/euprojects/stanmarkproject/>
3. The European Commission's approach to marketing to children encourages self-regulation, as stated in their White Paper: *A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues* COM(2007) 279 final, Brussels, 30.5.2007 (Page 6). The White Paper is available at [http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/nutrition/documents/nutrition\\_wp\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/documents/nutrition_wp_en.pdf)
4. The food and beverage companies' European pledges are at <http://www.eu-pledge.eu/>.
5. The Norwegian government's proposals for restricting marketing of foods and beverages to children are at [www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/hod/dok/hoeringer/hoeringsdok/2012/horing---forslag-til-ny-regulering-av-ma.html](http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/hod/dok/hoeringer/hoeringsdok/2012/horing---forslag-til-ny-regulering-av-ma.html) An unofficial English summary is at [www.iaso.org/resources/library/721/](http://www.iaso.org/resources/library/721/)
6. The World Health Organization's 2010 *Recommendations on marketing foods and beverages to children* can be found at [www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/marketing-food-to-children/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/marketing-food-to-children/en/index.html)
7. The International Association for the Study of Obesity is a not-for-profit organisation with over 10,000 professional members in 54 national and regional associations, based in London UK. See [www.iaso.org](http://www.iaso.org).

The StanMark Project on developing marketing standards for food and beverages has been part-funded by the European Union within the framework of the Pilot Project on Transatlantic Methods for Handling Global Challenges in the European Union and the United States. The funding agencies are not responsible for the use that may be made of any material contained in the StanMark Project outputs.

