

Press release

AVMSD: Once in a decade opportunity to protect children from alcohol and unhealthy food marketing

1 December 2016, Brussels. A coalition of over 40 European and national health organisations and NGOs has joined forces in a campaign to protect children from commercial communications for alcohol and unhealthy food, mobilising around the ongoing revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD).¹

On 1 December the event “AVMSD: *What about our Kids?*”² took place in the European Parliament, hosted by MEP Daciana Octavia Sârbu and organised by a coalition of ten organisations.³ The event gathered experts from a wide range of backgrounds to discuss the effects of marketing on children’s behaviours, tools to reduce child exposure to commercial communications for unhealthy food and alcohol and the effectiveness of self-regulatory schemes. Speakers included WHO Europe, European Commission, academia, healthcare payers and a wider panel for debate.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu, MEP: “*The European Union has a once in a decade opportunity to protect its children from ubiquitous marketing of unhealthy foods and alcohol. It is called the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and it comes in the shape of a watershed: no commercial communications for alcohol and unhealthy food during hours where children in great numbers watch television. The EU and its Member States and MEPs have an obligation to protect our children’s health and should not leave this to commercial interests and self-regulation*”.

It is well-established that advertising causes changes in consumption patterns, favouring the products advertised.⁴ Nevertheless, children and young people in Europe are still subjected to the aggressive marketing of alcohol and foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) on a frequent basis. The proposed revision of the Audio-Visual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) is a key opportunity to free Europe’s young people from health-harmful marketing that can’t be overlooked. Members of the European Parliament should grasp this occasion to amend the Directive by taking 3 additional steps to a better future for the younger generation:

¹ Joint Statement: “3 Steps towards healthier marketing – improve the AVMSD”. <http://bit.ly/2dla9Y9>

² Event webpage: “What about our kids?” <http://bit.ly/2eMNLqF>

³ European Heart Network (EHN); British Medical Association (BMA); Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE); European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare); European Association for the study of the liver (EASL); European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing (EUCAM); European Public Health Alliance (EPHA); International Association of non-profit Healthcare Payers (AIM); IOGT-NTO; Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)

⁴ WHO (2006) The extent nature and effects of food promotion to children: a review of the evidence. <http://bit.ly/2gDTITi>;

-Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum (2009) Does marketing communication impact on the volume and patterns of consumption of alcoholic beverages, especially by young people? <http://bit.ly/2g1asEb>;

-WHO (2016) Tackling food marketing to children in a digital world: trans-disciplinary Perspectives. <http://bit.ly/2eg052J>

1. Minimise young people's exposure to marketing of health-harmful products

No more TV adverts for alcohol, sugar sweetened beverages and sodas or foods high in fat, salt and sugar between 6am and 11pm. Self-regulation has been shown not to work and mandatory measures are needed to minimise the exposure of children and adolescents to health-harmful marketing, regardless of whether the advertising is directly aimed at them or not.⁵ Measures should cover television, on-demand services and online video-sharing platforms and include an EU-wide watershed that adequately captures children's and adolescents' viewing times.

2. Exclude alcohol and HFSS food from product placement and sponsorship

Product placement and sponsorship of alcoholic beverages and HFSS food are effective marketing techniques, and should be prohibited alongside those for tobacco and medicinal products.

3. Ensure that Member States can effectively limit broadcasts from other countries on public health grounds

The efforts of governments to reduce the negative health effects of alcohol and HFSS foods marketing should not be undermined by broadcasters established in other countries. The European Commission proposal to this effect should be supported.

Adolescence is a key window of developmental plasticity. Research has shown that changing nutrition for the better at this key life stage can dramatically decrease the likelihood of becoming obese or developing non-communicable diseases in adulthood.

– Ends –

Further information on event co-organizers:

European Heart Network: www.ehnheart.org

European Public Health Alliance (EPHA): www.epha.org

EUROCARE European Alcohol Policy Alliance: www.eurocare.org

European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL): www.easl.eu

AIM, the International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies: <http://aim-mutual.org/>

IOGT-NTO – Alcohol in All Policies: <http://iogt.org/>

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⁵ Noel et al. (2016) Industry self-regulation of alcohol marketing: a systematic review of content and exposure research. <http://bit.ly/2gRthxJ>

-Ronit et al. (2014) Obesity and industry self-regulation of food and beverage marketing: a literature review. <http://bit.ly/2gvs1Bc>

-Bartlett and Garde (2013) Time to Seize the (Red) Bull by the Horns: The European Union's Failure to Protect Children from Alcohol and Unhealthy Food Marketing. <http://bit.ly/2geTo0u>