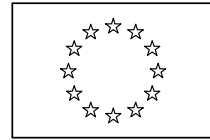




Flash Report
High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity
of 2 February 2012
Conclusions of the Chair



On 2 February 2012, the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity 14th meeting focused on fat and sugar taxes experiences in Member States, food reformulation and the application of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD). The WHO Europe presented how nutritional profiling could be a method to support nutrition policy and the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment provided an overview of the study carried out for the European Commission on Community-based initiatives to reduce childhood obesity in the EU.

A Commission representative outlined the EU taxation framework for national food and drink taxes. Food taxes are currently not subject to specific harmonised EU legislative provisions and Member States are not obliged to notify them to the European Commission. The Commission only ensures that national taxation is in line with the general provisions of EU law concerning the functioning of the internal market. So far, the Commission services have not identified major problems or any need to introduce a specific legislation on EU level on taxation of foods beyond national initiatives.

The Commission asked Denmark, France and Hungary to present their recent laws on taxes on food and drinks. In particular, the Chair asked them to describe the scientific or other policy grounds on which the specific measures were established and the mechanisms that were put in place to measure their implementation and their public health impact.

Denmark presented their historical approach on taxation of food and drinks, as well as recent developments in the taxation of chocolate and confectionary, soft drinks, and saturated fat. The tax on saturated fat, in force since 1 October 2011, is charged at the rate of DKK 16 (€1.15) per kg saturated fat on domestic and imported food. It applies to meat, including chicken and pork, as well as to cheese, butter, edible oils, margarine, spreadable products and other food such as snack products. The annual revenues are expected to be more than €200 million and

lead to a reduction of 4% in saturated fat consumption.

Hungary implemented a public health food tax on 1 September 2011 on packaged products with high sugar, salt or caffeine levels. This includes energy drinks with added sugar and caffeine, soft drinks with added sugar above 5g/100ml, chocolate, biscuits, confectionary containing above 25g sugar/100g, salty snacks containing more than 1g salt/100g and dried soup and gravy mixes containing more than 5g salt/100g. Hungary underlined that the law does not include basic food stuffs. It only affects products that have healthier alternatives. To monitor progress they will use a national database on food stuffs that will facilitate the measurement of the evolution of the ingredients.

The French soft drink tax took effect on 1 January 2012. It is applied at a rate of €7.16 per hectolitre to all beverages with added sugar or with artificial sweeteners such as fruit juices with added sugars, water and carbonated drinks containing added sugar. The specificity of the approach is that the tax applies to all beverages without consideration of the quantity of added sugar. France hopes to achieve a target of a 25% reduction in the proportion of children consuming more than half a glass of sugared beverages per day in five years. The estimated tax income is €280 million (€240 for added sugars and €40 for artificial sweeteners) of which 50% are earmarked for the social security system.

The debate revealed the complexity involved in monitoring the impact of food tax measures on health. Member States also raised issues such as the impact of such measures on cross-border trade as well as the relevance to the quality of food products. Some Member States also mentioned that taxation measures should be counter-balanced either by reduced taxes on healthier food groups like fruits and vegetables or by returning investment in prevention (e.g. through social marketing). The discussion revealed clearly that taxation could not be considered sufficient on its own to counter overweight and obesity trends and that it could only be part of a more global approach and range of

measures. The Chair concluded that the High Level Group will continue to follow developments around food and beverages taxation initiatives. The Chair also invited Member States that intended to carry out health impact assessments, such as Ireland, to share their experience with the Group as well as possible monitoring tools and outcomes of these measures in the Member States where such taxes are already implemented.

The High Level Group also discussed food reformulation, its priority work focus for 2012. The Group discussed proposals for benchmarks for the EU Framework for National Initiatives on Selected Nutrients, agreed by the High Level Group in February 2011. High Level Group members agreed on the importance of focusing the work on specific targets without departing from the holistic approach on all nutrients as well as portion sizes and frequency of consumption. The High Level Group agreed that, on the basis of the collected information, the European Commission would now work towards proposing a common framework for the reduction of saturated fat at the next meeting including possible benchmarks for reduction. The work will be based on the experience of the development of the common Salt Reduction Framework that led to successful results including agreement at the political level in 2010.

Dr João Breda from WHO Europe made a presentation on Nutrient Profiling – A method to support nutrition policy. Nutrient Profiling is the science of classifying or ranking foods according to their nutritional composition for reasons related to preventing disease and promoting health. Dr Breda stressed the need to involve all stakeholders in the development of nutrient

profiling, the necessity to ensure that it is evidence-based and that clear purposes are identified.

The Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, Centre for Prevention and Health Services Research, presented a survey on the Community Based Initiatives (CBIs) to reduce childhood obesity currently developed in the European Union. Schools appeared to be the main setting for action in the majority of the cases. For France, Hungary, Iceland, Spain and Sweden the initiatives targeted at least 5% of the youth population aged up to 18.

The Commission services made a presentation on the state of play of the application of the Audiovisual Media Service Directive (AVMSD) 2010/13/EU. Under the Directive, by December 2011, a report shall assess the issue of television advertising accompanying or included in children's programmes, and in particular whether the quantitative and qualitative rules contained in this Directive have afforded the level of protection required. The report is currently being prepared and is expected to be adopted during spring 2012.

The Commission finally informed the High Level Group about the launching of a steering group for the evaluation of the current "Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues". This Steering Group will be composed of HLG members from Cyprus, Germany, France, Slovenia, and Hungary, as well as representatives from relevant Commission services. The evaluation report is expected in the course of the first quarter of 2013.