

# Implementing Food Marketing Codes in European Countries to Protect Children and Adolescents' Health and Rights: Process and Challenges

## Introduction

To prevent childhood obesity and to protect children's rights, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends restricting the marketing of food high in fats, sugars, and salt (HFSS). In 2022, thirty-one countries had a **Code of Practice (CoP)** in place for food businesses and media advertisers to follow when advertising HFSS food to children. However, marketing practices that are harmful to children up to 18 years old remain pervasive across all settings. In the European Union (EU), the Joint Action (JA) Best-ReMaP aims to provide guidance for Member States (MS) to implement best practices (BP) in food marketing **CoP**. Ireland co-leads the food marketing Work Package (WP6), together with Portugal.

## Process and Challenges

Food marketing CoP to children analysed:

### Ireland

- Children's Commercial Communications Code (BAI 2013)
- Code of Standards for Advertising and Marketing Communications (ASAI 2016)

### Portugal

- Law No 30/2019, of 23 April

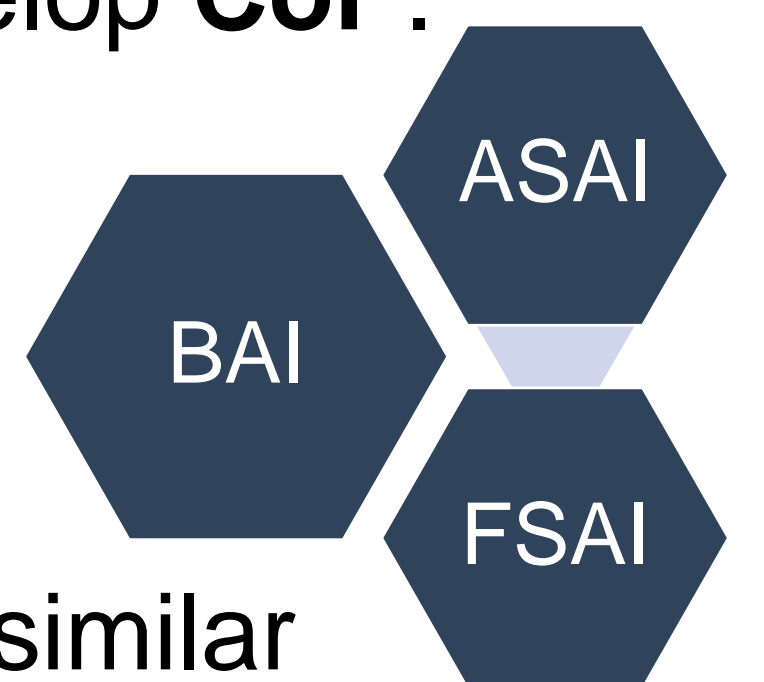
### Slovenia

- Slovenian Advertising Code (Slovenian Advertising Chamber 2011)

European MS participating in workshop on **CoP**: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal and Serbia.

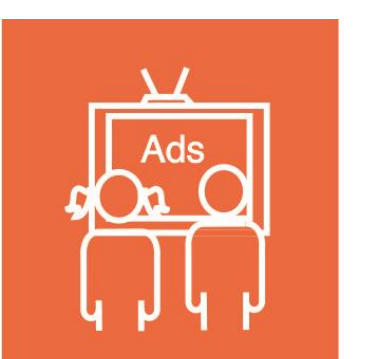
Experiences shared by Irish advertising regulators:

- Engage with public health bodies to develop **CoP**.
- Level the knowledge base of experts by providing reference documents, including national health policies and international guidelines.
- Work with experienced policy-makers in similar areas, e.g., tobacco regulators.



Implementation challenges:

According to an assessment by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), 34% of all marketing codes available globally include nutrient criteria to identify unhealthy foods and 39% have a monitoring system in place. Most of the marketing **CoP** have limitations in terms of the age group and marketing media to which the rules apply.



## Methods

The Irish Team in the School of Public Health, UCC

Analysed **CoP** from Portugal, Ireland and Slovenia

Assessed the **CoP** against a Marketing toolkit (EC JRC 2019)

In March 2022, a workshop with 12 EU MS was organised online

Advertising regulators & owners of Irish **CoP** shared experience

Implementation **BP** for food marketing **CoP** were discussed

A technical guidance for implementing food marketing **CoP** report was developed

Elements of **BP** and implementation challenges were outlined

## Conclusion and Recommendations

**BP** were identified based on their effectiveness and transferability to a different context. Six **BP** for immediate action to reduce the marketing of unhealthy foods to children were proposed to EU MS: 1) protecting all children up to 18 years of age, 2) defining nutritional criteria to identify unhealthy food and drinks that should not be marketed to children, 3) covering all settings and all forms of marketing techniques, 4) developing monitoring tools, 5) building capacity at the national level and 6) coordinating action between relevant sectors. These **BP** incorporate the best available evidence from the WHO, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and JRC. Until September 2023, WP6 will continue to help EU MS on integrating **BP** in the implementation of children's rights-protecting food marketing codes into their national policy.

