

Press Release

PolMark results released
REDUCING THE PRESSURE OF MARKETING FOOD AND BEVERAGES TO CHILDREN

Ljubljana, 25st August, 2009 – Representatives of various Slovenian institutions related to food marketing believe that marketing energy-rich, fat and sweet food or drinks and childhood obesity are related. They also agree that this area should be completely controlled, but differ on how to do so. This was revealed in a recently completed research PolMark, financed by the European Commission; ten other countries took part along with Slovenia.

The research for Slovenia, created to contribute to reducing obesity among children, was carried out by the National Institute of Public Health (IVZ) from December, 2008, to May, 2009. The consequences of unhealthy diets, among other things also encouraged by marketing junk food, are worrying. In 1987, a bit over 15 percent of boys and girls were overweight or even obese in Slovenia; and in 2007, 28 percent of the boys and 24 percent of the girls. In the twenty years, the environment in which we live changed in terms of marketing and availability of food and drinks. In Slovenia, not only every sixth, but every fourth child is overweight.

Ads aimed at children promote mostly fatty, sugary and salty foods

Research has so far shown that considering TV advertisements aimed at children, most advertise fat, sugar and salt rich foods. Children are exposed to the increasingly intricate marketing of food and beverages that for example also includes the Internet, toys included with the foods and advertising the food in schools; the interlocutors believe that the most effective is the placement of sweets with cartoon images on the wrapping next to the cash registers regularly used by customers. Studies show that children accept advertising and more often desire advertised foods.

Yes, restriction on TV advertising, but what kind of?

“We interviewed the key informants, that is representatives of individual sectors, consumer organizations, public/medical experts, NGOs that deal with children and families, representatives of the industry and advertisers, who are all more or less in agreement about the potential influences of marketing on children, about the benefits of food industry companies self-restricting marketing and about the need to completely control this field. Differing opinions were voiced, mostly about what the restrictions should be like, there was no concordance.” was the comment of Mojca Gabrijelčič Blenkuš from the IVZ. The interlocutors in our research were not completely in agreement up to what age the children should be protected from advertising – most were in favor of an age restriction, even up to maturity. There were also disagreements on which TV programs or which time slots should be restricted for marketing food and beverages.

Insufficient control of marketing food and beverages

The research report shows that compared to other countries, Slovenia has a relatively low level of control over marketing food, and the highest level of control was perceived in Spain, the lowest in France. In Slovenia there are several regulations broadly controlling the area, but none are specifically about marketing food and beverages. The interlocutors in the research believed that the best possibilities of control over marketing were legal regulation or co-regulation of several possible practices of control (legal regulation and self-regulation). The European Commission is in favour of self-regulation of food industry companies and is trying to find a way to monitor it as effectively as possible.

Attempts to increase the healthiness of dietary choices of children and youths

The regulation of marketing food and beverages to children will influence the changes in the environment that now encourages frequent consumption of larger quantities of unhealthy food and beverages. As the report states, the children should also be given knowledge and skills to be able to choose a healthy diet. Generally any one of us can report inappropriate marketing and the report includes an example of such a complaint.

The World Health Organization has established an action network to reduce the pressures of marketing unhealthy food to children and youths too, and Slovenia is one of the members.

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The project PolMark (“Policies on marketing food and beverages to children”) is part of the study on control of marketing intended for children and is financed by the European Community. It is carried out by eleven partner states, EU members. Along Slovenia, there is the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, the Czech Republic, Poland and Cyprus. Addition information at the webpage (http://www.ivz.si/javne_datoteke/datoteke/2011-POL_MARK_slovensko_porocilo.pdf) and at <http://www.polmarkproject.net>.

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