Facts on ultra-processed foods and sugary beverages

Impacts: Health ([ARC, World Cancer Research Fund and World Obesity Atlas]).

- Approximately two billion adults are living with high body mass index (BMI), including 800 million who are living with obesity (defined as BMI ≥ 30).
- One billion people globally, including 1 in 5 women and 1 in 7 men are expected to be living with obesity by 2030.
- Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are the most affected, as the number of people living with obesity has more than doubled since 2010 and even tripled in low-income countries.
- Obesity is connected to 12 types of cancer, notable: mouth, pharynx and larynx; oesophageal; stomach; pancreatic; gallbladder; liver; colon and rectum; postmenopausal breast cancer; ovarian cancer; endometrial or womb cancer; prostate; and kidney cancers.
- The top five cancers for women where obesity is a risk factor are breast, womb, gallbladder, kidney and colon cancers.
- The top five cancer for men where obesity is a risk factor are colon, kidney, rectum, pancreas and oesophageal cancers.
- People with obesity are often victims of stigma and discrimination, including in medical settings ([World Obesity Federation]).
- Multiple factors contribute to obesity that are beyond an individual’s control. In addition to genetic predispositions, a toxic food environment and poor nutrition education that contribute to being overweight ([Healthline]).
- Unhealthy food choices tend to be less expensive (about USD 1.50 cheaper per day than healthy food according to a review of 27 studies in 10 countries), more convenient (faster to cook or buy) and more easily satisfy craving for salt or sugar ([Plutus Foundation]).

The Food and Beverage Industry

- Fast-food restaurants spent $5 billion in total advertising in the US in 2019, an increase of over 9% compared to 2012. ([Fast Food Facts 2021])
- Advertising continues to target disproportionately Hispanic and Black youth and fast-food restaurants did not actively promote healthier menu items. In the US in 2019, preschoolers, children, and teens viewed on average 2.1 to 2.3 fast-food TV ads per day, with Black preschoolers, children, and teens viewed approximately 75% more fast-food TV ads than their White peers.
• The unhealthy foods industry often finances research that supports results that are favourable to their business; for instance, studies financed by Coca-Cola reported no association of sugary drinks to diabetes. (World Nutrition Journal)

• A study conducted in India found that most packaged food and fast-food items contained dangerously high levels of salt and fat in them, much higher than the thresholds set by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (Centre for Science and Environment, India)

Global commitments
- In 2013, governments agreed to a set of voluntary targets to reduce NCDs that they aimed to achieve by 2025, including to reduce the prevalence of obesity to 2010 levels. All countries are significantly off track, with most having less than 10% chance of meeting that target.

- In the EU, there are various legislative or voluntary (industry self-regulation) policies to address sugar intake and restrict the marketing of foods that are high in sugar, salt and fats to children; a major industry self-regulation effort is the EU Pledge.