

## WFA's progress report on the EU Pledge responsible marketing to children initiative

The [EU Pledge](#) is a commitment by 23 leading food and beverage companies, representing an estimated 80%+ of EU food and beverage marketing spend, to change what they advertise to children across Europe.

Launched in 2007, as a commitment of the [World Federation of Advertisers \(WFA\)](#) to the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, the EU Pledge programme has made a significant difference to the types of food and beverage advertising children see across media in the EU. Yearly reports with the detailed methodology are available [here](#).

WFA and EU Pledge member companies support the European Commission's Code of Conduct on responsible business and marketing practices and are committed to working towards the Code's objectives and targets, notably to the aspirational objective to reverse malnutrition and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in the EU and the aspirational target of a food environment that makes it easier to choose healthy and sustainable diets.

In line with the Terms of Reference of the EU's Code of Conduct for Responsible Business and Marketing Practices, EU Pledge signatories have committed to carry out independent third-party compliance monitoring of the EU Pledge commitments.

### Key 2021 results

- **TV:** The overall compliance rate is **98.84%**
- **Digital:**
  - **96.49% of websites** reviewed were deemed compliant with the EU Pledge. 2 out of 57 websites were found non-compliant with the commitment.
  - **96.53% of social media profiles** reviewed were deemed compliant with the EU Pledge. 5 out of 144 profiles were found non-compliant with the commitment.
  - **100% of influencer profiles** reviewed were deemed compliant with the EU Pledge.

The record of compliance is positive and consistent with previous years. EU Pledge member companies last strengthened their commitment on responsible food and beverage marketing in July 2021. The 2022 compliance monitoring report will be the first to monitor against the enhanced commitment.

Compliance with the EU Pledge commitment was carried out by the following independent third parties:

- **Ebiquity**<sup>1</sup>, to review EU Pledge member companies' compliance with the commitment relating to TV advertising;
- **EASA – The European Advertising Standards Alliance**<sup>2</sup>, to review EU Pledge companies' branded websites, social media pages and influencer profiles, for compliance with the EU Pledge commitment.

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<sup>1</sup> [Ebiquity](#) is the world leader in media investment analysis harnessing the power of data to provide independent, fact-based advice, enabling brand owners to perfect media investment decisions and improve business outcomes. As a data-driven solutions company Ebiquity help brand owners drive efficiency and effectiveness from their media spend, eliminating wastage and creating value. Ebiquity is able to provide independent, unbiased advice and solutions to brands because they have no commercial interest in any part of the media supply chain which is why they are conducting the analysis for the EU Pledge.

<sup>2</sup> The [European Advertising Standards Alliance](#) brings together national advertising self-regulatory organisations in Europe. Based in Brussels, EASA is the European voice for advertising self-regulation.

The methodology and process of the monitoring of company-owned websites and social media profiles were reviewed by Liselot Hudders, associate professor in Marketing Communication and Consumer Behavior at Ghent University and Director of the Center for Persuasive Communication, and Dr Dieneke Van de Sompel, postdoctoral researcher at the department of Marketing, Innovation and Organization, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration and assistant professor at the department of Communication studies, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Ghent University.

Additionally, WFA commissioned the independent research firm Nielsen, to carry out an **analysis of children’s exposure to the online marketing of food and beverages high in fat, salt, and sugar (‘HFSS’)**.<sup>3</sup> Using so called **avatar technology**, a methodology that mimics the real browsing behaviour of children online, Nielsen was able to estimate the probabilistic rate of child exposure to HFSS advertising. The results demonstrate relatively low levels of online exposure to ‘HFSS’ ads in the EU:

- On average, only **1.53%** of ads served to children online are for ‘HFSS’ products;
- On average, a child is served only **one ‘HFSS’ ad per 450 websites visited**

These findings serve as a reminder that, though it continues to be important to ensure that child exposure to HFSS advertising remains quite limited, we have already come a long way. WFA is committed to continuing its work with EU Pledge signatories to further reduce children’s exposure to HFSS, in line with societal and regulatory expectations on leading food and non-alcoholic beverage companies.

#### EU Pledge members:



**About WFA:** The World Federation of Advertisers (WFA) is the voice of marketers worldwide, representing 90% of global marketing communications spend — over €800 billion per year. WFA helps its members set standards for responsible marketing communications worldwide, and encourages leadership initiatives, which go beyond compliance with existing industry standards. WFA signed the EU’s Code of Conduct on 5 July 2021.

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<sup>3</sup> The Digital Avatar Project used four avatars (simulated consumer profiles) to track advertising activity across 12 markets, 6 of which are in the EU (Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Ireland, Netherlands, and Spain). Through the findings, Nielsen estimated the general pervasiveness of ‘HFSS’ advertising, as well as the probabilistic rate of a child’s exposure to ‘HFSS’ advertising. The study employed four simulated consumer profiles, also known as avatars: Child Under 12, Teenager 12-17, Adult and Neutral. The media universe was formulated as a mix of sites and YouTube channels popular with — and having content/genre affinity with — teen and child audiences, as well as generally top-ranking sites and channels, to achieve a simulation of the average browsing habits in each country. Only non-logged-in environments were covered by the study.