



# Network on Children's Rights and Nutrition in the Food Retail Sector

Summary Report  
(2021–2023)

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**Summary Report**  
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## Foreword by UNICEF

Every child has the right to adequate food and nutrition for optimal growth and development. Yet, across the world, millions of infants, children, and adolescents do not have access to the nutrition they need to survive and thrive.

Two in three young children worldwide are not fed the minimum diverse diets to grow well. Further, studies from Australia, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Serbia and the Sudan reported that one in three young children were fed at least one processed or ultra-processed food or drink daily. In an increasing number of countries and settings, unhealthy diets are driven by food environments flooded with cheap ultra-processed foods that are damaging our children's nutrition, growth and development.

### **This is a call to action for all of us.**

As the [UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030](#) recognizes, upholding children's right to adequate nutrition means upholding their related rights to food, health, water and sanitation, education, protection and a livable planet. It means that sustainable solutions can only be achieved through multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration and action. It also means that while governments are the primary duty-bearers of children's right to nutrition, we cannot ignore the crucial role the private sector – including investors – must play in promoting responsible business practices for children.

Children's diets are heavily influenced by the policies, practices and products of the food industry, including

producers, manufacturers and retailers. Radical changes in our world have led to a rapid shift away from traditional food sources, like fresh food markets, towards modern food retail environments that are dominated by large food retail chains. In high income countries, and increasingly in middle- and low-income countries, people buy most of their food from large retailers, or small retailers owned by larger chains. In modern retail environments, the types of foods available (most of which are packaged and ultra-processed), the prices and affordability of such foods, and the way they are promoted have a direct and substantial influence on the foods and beverages people buy and on how nutritious and healthy people's diets are. Food retailers are an important cog in the machinery and can do a lot to support healthy food environments for children worldwide.

We are pleased to have this partnership with Norges Bank Investment Management (NBIM), whose voice and influence as one of the world's largest institutional investors is instrumental to promoting better food retail practices for children. This Network Summary Report and the accompanying practical Guidance Framework shine a light on the vital role that food retailers play. It provides recommendations on embedding child rights considerations into core business policies and practices and explores actions they – along with key stakeholders – can take to guarantee food environments that deliver nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable diets for children.

To do any less would be to fall short of global commitments, undermine our shared future, and abrogate our collective responsibilities to ensure every child has a fair chance at life.

Building on our successful partnership with NBIM since 2017, we are pleased to jointly release these resources confident that they will inspire responsible business practices for children across the food retail sector and beyond.



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## Foreword by Norges Bank Investment Management

At Norges Bank Investment Management (NBIM), we manage the Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global, with a mission to safeguard and build financial wealth for future generations. We consider the protection of children's rights and health as an integral part of future value creation and growth, and therefore, our mission. In fact, children's rights was the first topic on which we published investor expectations, in 2008. We expect all companies to respect children's rights.

Companies may impact children not only through their own operations and supply chains, but also through the use of products and services and the marketing of these. Children may be particularly susceptible to harmful marketing practices that promote unhealthy food, and they may have limited control over what they consume. To fully understand their impact on children's rights to nutrition and health, companies need to incorporate such considerations into their policies, risk assessments and strategies.

As we gradually learn more about the adverse effects of unhealthy food environments on children's nutrition, we also understand how changing these environments has the potential to contribute to better health outcomes. As an investor, we wish to contribute to raising awareness and standards and to enhancing company practices that impact children's right to nutrition.

Building on the positive experience and impact of the [2017 NBIM-UNICEF garment and footwear network](#), we established a new network with UNICEF in 2021, focusing on child rights and nutrition in the food retail sector. This partnership rests on the idea that we can leverage our networks to bring together companies and subject-matter experts to facilitate dialogue and share experiences on topics to promote respect for children's rights.

This Network Report summarizes learnings and findings from workshops in the food retail network. The Network has been valuable to us as an investor. We now know more about the risks that companies face, and the opportunities they have to manage them and find value-enhancing solutions. One of our key takeaways is that leading food retailers are aware of the impact they have on children's health and are passionate about taking steps to address adverse impacts on children. At the same time, this is an area under development – where practices and local regulations vary – and corporate reporting is not standardized.

Several companies have shared that they find it difficult to know which actions are optimal to address this topic. Varying regulatory requirements based on jurisdiction, lack of consensus on what constitutes healthy and unhealthy foods, lack of agreement on metrics and targets that best measure progress, and mixed results on studies that

attempt to measure food retailers' interventions, are among the issues that complicate the task of promoting children's nutrition in this sector.

Today we also publish another document: a **practical guidance framework for food retail companies** on actions they can take to promote children's rights and nutrition. The tangible actions and metrics this guidance provides will hopefully serve as an inspiration for food retailers that want to take additional steps in this area. We also hope that this guidance can help support standardization of reporting metrics over time.



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**Carine Smith Ihenacho,**  
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## Introduction

**This report presents a summary of the activities and outputs of the Network on Children’s Rights and Nutrition in the Food Retail Sector (the Network).** The Network was established in 2021 by Norges Bank Investment Management (NBIM) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

Food retailers play a critical role in shaping children’s food environments, in particular facilitating access to healthy, affordable and sustainable food – while limiting the promotion of unhealthy foods. Globally, the business practices of leading food retailers have an important impact on what children and families eat and the healthiness of their diets.

As a result, food retailers – and the food and beverage industry at large – are increasingly subject to greater scrutiny and, in some countries, more stringent regulation, including marketing restrictions, mandatory front-of-pack labelling, targeted taxes and rules on product placement and promotion in-store. Simultaneously, consumers are becoming more aware of the benefits of healthy foods, shifting demand towards healthier options.

The purpose of the Network was to create a platform for food retailers and subject-matter experts to explore approaches that simultaneously create business opportunities, mitigate financial and sustainability

risks, while also making progress in nutrition and health for children. NBIM’s significant investments in the food retail industry, coupled with its commitment to promoting children’s rights and UNICEF’s subject-matter expertise, provided a good foundation for placing children at the centre of the discussion with food retailers on healthy food retail environments for children. The Network allowed food retailers to come together to share their experiences and encourage further actions to promote children’s rights to nutrition.

The Network was active for two years between March 2021 to March 2023.

*“Children’s rights are a longstanding priority area for our responsible investment work. The rise in unhealthy diets and obesity around the world represents a new and growing challenge for children, families, society and business alike. Companies in the food retail sector can be exposed to financial and sustainability risks related to a changing food regulatory environment, public calls to take action and potential shifts in consumer demand. We are pleased to have partnered with UNICEF to convene this network of food retailers with the aim to strengthen industry practices.”*

– **Carine Smith Ihenacho, Chief Governance and Compliance Officer. Norges Bank Investment Management**

*“Globally, child malnutrition – in all its forms – is largely driven by the poor quality of children’s diets. At the centre is a broken food system that fails to provide children with the nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable diets they need to survive and thrive.*

*While governments remain the primary duty-bearers of children’s right to adequate food and nutrition, food industry businesses have a responsibility to respect, promote and fulfill this right – and to do no harm through their practices, services and products.*

*Our partnership with NBIM has helped articulate how the food retail sector can contribute to protecting the right to healthier foods, food environments and food practices for children, adolescents and families. It raises the bar for all because we can and must do better.”*

– **Victor Aguayo, Director of Nutrition and Child Development, Programme Group, UNICEF**



## Network participants

The Network brought together leading food retail companies from around the globe in four workshops on specific themes. Companies that have been involved in the Network include Kesko Corporation (Finland), SEVEN & i HLDGS. Co., Ltd. (Japan),

Migros Ticaret (Türkiye), Shoprite Holdings Ltd (South Africa), Koninklijke Ahold Delhaize NV (Netherlands), and Woolworths Group (Australia). In addition, other retailers such as ALDI Nord and Tesco PLC joined workshops as invited guests.

The Network also involved a range of experts from international and non-governmental organizations, academic experts, and business and human rights experts. The Network was jointly led by UNICEF and NBIM, with support from Deakin University.



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## Main objectives of the Network

The Network was established to provide a virtual platform to explore food retailers' impact on children's right to health and nutrition, share best practices and improve their business practices. Specifically, the Network's main objectives were to:



**Increase awareness and understanding among food retailers on how children are impacted by food products and marketing practices and the related financial and sustainability risks.**



**Increase awareness among food retailers about their responsibilities towards children.**



**Improve retail practices incorporated in the engaged companies' guidelines, including key definitions, reporting methods and communication, etc.**



## Key activities and outputs

### 1 Evidence review

At the outset, to inform the Network's virtual workshops and the Guidance Framework, Deakin University conducted an [Evidence Review](#) of food retailer actions to support healthier food retail environments for children. This overview summarized the evidence relating to actions that food retailers can take to create healthy food environments and address unhealthy diets. It laid the foundation for the development of an evidence-informed framework that aims to encourage retailer actions to create healthier retail food environments and contribute to improved business practices that support good nutrition among children and families.

### 2 Virtual workshops and dialogue with youth

The Network organized four virtual workshops and several bilateral conversations, between March 2021 and March 2023. The primary goal was to engage companies and subject-matter experts through working group sessions that reflected the evidence collected. The sessions focused on the most important aspects to be addressed in company policies and practices, company experiences, challenges and opportunities. In parallel, UNICEF partnered with several organizations to consult with youth in 'co-create' sessions in Europe and Australia. The key messages from these consultations were shared with the workshop participants.

### 3 Guidance Framework

While governments are the primary duty-bearers for the fulfilment of child rights and responsible for guaranteeing food environments that deliver nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable diets for children, businesses have a responsibility to respect and support children's rights and avoid harm through their products and practices. However, there has been a lack of guidance around the exact actions that food retailers can take to positively influence the diets of children and families and respond to growing regulatory, reputational and financial risks.

The final key output of this Network was to support the development of a [Guidance Framework](#) to provide practical support to food retailers and investors on effective steps to create healthy food retail environments and contribute to improved business practices that support good nutrition among children and families. The primary focus is on supermarkets, but many aspects of the guidance provided in the document are likely to be relevant to other businesses in the food value chain, including restaurants and food manufacturers.

The foundation of the Guidance Framework is formed from the insights garnered from the Network's four workshops and the evidence review – in addition to the detailed written feedback collected from Network participants and leading experts from relevant academic and non-government organizations focused on improving population health.







**BOX 1**

## EVIDENCE REVIEW

The evidence review included academic and grey literature to identify the impact of different aspects of supermarket environments on nutrition and health, the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving the healthiness of supermarket environments, and current practices. The review collated the findings and summarized the evidence across four ‘action areas’: **1) corporate strategy; 2) product development and labelling; 3) product availability and placement; and 4) promotional activities.** Illustrative good practice examples were highlighted for each action area:

<p><b>Corporate strategy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicitly incorporating nutrition and health as a core part of corporate strategy</li> <li>• Adopting an evidence-based definition of ‘healthy’ that is based on national nutrition standards and/or guidelines and international evidence</li> <li>• Actively supporting implementation of global recommendations to improve nutrition, including refraining from lobbying activities that oppose or delay public health regulations to address unhealthy diets</li> <li>• Setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) goals related to a range of nutrition-related action areas</li> <li>• Regularly monitoring and evaluating progress against goals</li> <li>• Disclosing commitments and quantified progress against commitments in publicly accessible reports</li> </ul>
<p><b>Product development and labelling</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introducing new healthier ‘own-brand’ product lines while shifting away from ultra-processed products</li> <li>• Continuing to reformulate existing ‘own-brand’ products (including products for infants and young children) to make them healthier by reducing levels of added sugar, sodium and harmful fats – in line with, and in support of, relevant government targets and guidelines (refer to recommendations on the use of non-nutritive sweeteners by the WHO Nutrition Guidance Expert Advisory Group, once finalized)</li> <li>• Complying with government regulations and recommendations for front-of-package nutrition labelling; and where national-level government policies are not in place, adopting globally recommended best practice front-of-package nutrition labelling on eligible ‘own-brand’ products</li> <li>• Supporting implementation of front-of-pack labelling by displaying summary nutrition information for all products on shelves or shelf/price tags and in online stores</li> </ul>
<p><b>Product availability and placement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing in-store placement strategies that promote less healthy foods (e.g., unhealthy products at the eye and hand height of children, at checkouts, end-of-aisle displays and island bins). Instead, ensuring that healthy food and non-food items are promoted in prominent places in-store</li> <li>• Restricting sales of certain less healthy products (e.g., energy drinks) to children</li> </ul>
<p><b>Promotional activities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that pricing strategies (e.g., price promotions, discounts or loyalty discounts) are used to incentivize the purchase of healthier foods, and do not incentive the purchase of less healthy foods</li> <li>• Reducing or ceasing other promotional strategies of less healthy foods that appeal to children (e.g., product packaging that features cartoon and animated characters, celebrities and/or images that appeal to children)</li> <li>• Stopping marketing practices that undermine breastfeeding and prevent mothers from meeting their own breastfeeding goals, including marketing of infant formula, follow-on formula and growing-up milks as set out in the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes</li> </ul>



# Key discussion topics and insights from the Network

## Topic 1

### Exploring the integration of nutrition and health into corporate practices

The Network kicked off with the first workshop in June 2021. Deakin University presented an overview of the global evidence base and the key domains of action, including the importance of integrating nutrition and health in corporate practices (see **Box 1**). The conversations included contributions from World Benchmarking Alliance and Ahold Delhaize.

During discussions, the companies shared challenges they face in implementing initiatives to support better nutrition. Many companies recognized that enhanced knowledge about nutrition and healthy diets does not always translate into behavioural change, and that multiple factors influence consumer choice. While this is a challenge, it was recognized that incentivizing people to make healthier choices is the way forward for retailers, and that there is the potential for actions in this space. The definition of 'healthy' was cited as a continuous challenge that affects the decisions of retailers; having solid, evidence-based definitions is important for creating a level playing field.

It was also noted that retailers do not operate in a vacuum. There needs to be awareness that there are other food outlets where people can buy food, and that retailers need to take this into consideration.

In addition, front-of-pack nutrition labelling and agreeing on region-wide or global approaches were also recognized as challenges. One company highlighted that the uncertainty around a forthcoming government-endorsed label meant it was difficult for the company to plan. Again, having one labelling system clearly defined could help create a level playing field.



## Topic 2

### Developing a healthy product portfolio

The second workshop was held on in October 2021, with a specific focus on how food retailers can develop a healthy product portfolio. Deakin University presented the public health relevance of improving product portfolios before experts from Oxford University spoke to examples in the United Kingdom. Woolworths provided a retailer perspective on the opportunities and challenges of developing a healthy product portfolio.

The discussion on companies' achievements in terms of healthy products revolved around salt reduction, sugar reduction in sweetened beverages, increasing sales of healthy own-brand products, introducing a healthy food range for children with a "No Junk" promise, and improving food supply through brand guidelines and reformulation. The Network members highlighted consumer demand for healthy products, better nutrition labelling and government regulation and/or policy action as drivers of opportunity. As for the major challenges, company representatives highlighted the uncertain and unpredictable policy landscape that is difficult to navigate, higher cost of healthier ingredients and lack of consumer demand for healthy products.

Woolworths shared data from their customers showing heightened demand for healthier options, but that these need to be affordable. As a result, Woolworths is committed to shifting the needle in health as part of its sustainability plan. Other retailers reflected on similar challenges related to specific target groups, costs of developing healthier products and predictions for 2030 in terms of regulation. The need for regulation to create a level playing field was emphasized, yet there should also be room for collaboration between governments, the food retail sector, civil society and investors, to shift the needle through improved practices.





## Topic 3

### In-store marketing to children

As part of the third workshop, hosted in March 2022, the Network came together to discuss marketing to children within food retail environments. Deakin University provided a public health perspective on food marketing to children and common marketing strategies aimed towards children in retail settings. UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean representatives presented UNICEF's regional food retail assessment toolkit and study **results**, including an overview of methodology, summary of key results from five countries studied, and recommendations for action.

Since young people are both the customers of today and of tomorrow, elevating and listening to the voices of young people is of great importance. As such, EAT Foundation joined this workshop to present the views of young people on the types of changes they would want to see in food retail environments, with results from three participatory consultations with 50 young people (aged 12–23 years old) across Europe and Australia (see **Box 2**).

The retailers then discussed how they could ensure they avoid marketing unhealthy and harmful products to children within their stores. **The five key takeaways from those discussions were:**

### 1

#### The challenge of competition among food retailers

Retailers have ideas about which actions they would like to take in terms of in-store marketing that impact children, but identified the need to compete among retailers as a barrier to implementing stricter policies.

### 2

#### Bigger brands and products are more challenging

Supermarkets are less able to influence the marketing or packaging decisions of bigger “A Brands”. However, some bigger retailers have more leverage and could adopt stricter policies in their stores with less obstacles.

### 3

#### The need for a level playing field

Supermarkets could deal with these issues collectively if government regulation levelled the playing field.

### 4

#### Agreeing on what is healthy versus not healthy

It is challenging to change marketing practices around in-store promotions if there is not a commonly used definition for what is healthy and for what is unhealthy. It is important for governments to adopt a single model.

### 5

#### Better reward programmes

Personalized reward programmes, which give customers discounts on future shopping, can incentivize people to buy more healthy products.





**BOX 2**

## Youth consultations on healthier food retail environments

In 2021 and 2022, as part of the overall partnership with NBIM, UNICEF – alongside EAT Foundation, The Food Foundation, Bite Back 2030 and VicHealth – coordinated three youth consultations across Europe and Australia. Harnessing the interactive CO-CREATE Dialogue Tool, the consultations aimed to gain a better understanding of young people’s experiences in food retail environments and ideas to shape them to be healthier, affordable and more sustainable. The consultations involved 50 youth, with representation across gender, cultural and indigenous groups. Discussions centred around aspects of the four ‘P’s’ of marketing – product, price, placement and promotion. Overall, the young people that took part in the consultations would like access to healthy, affordable and convenient food that does not compromise taste, sustainability and ethical options. They would also like increased information, accessible supermarkets and positive marketing.

Specifically, the young people consulted want:

- Healthy and affordable food that tastes good: greater variety of healthy, affordable foods, portion-controlled products and fewer processed foods.
- Sustainable, ethical, and culturally appropriate options: locally sourced, fairtrade, less plastic and packaging, in-season and access to foods from different cultures.
- More information, less temptation: Clearer and more transparent labelling to distinguish between processed and unprocessed foods and support to make healthy choices.
- Marketing, but for good: less promotion of unhealthy, processed food, more promotion of fresh foods.



## Topic 4

### In-store promotion of nutritious foods to children

The fourth and final workshop, in September 2022, covered the in-store promotion of nutritious foods to children while spotlighting some vanguard companies on this topic. Once again, Deakin University provided an overview of the evidence of existing promotion strategies of nutritious foods, highlighting that customers around

the world are seeking healthier and more sustainable products. The Network then heard presentations from both Tesco PLC (**Box 3**) and Migros Ticaret (Türkiye), (**Box 4**), highlighting the actions these companies have taken to encourage the consumption of nutritious foods.



**BOX 3**

## Tesco's promotion of healthy & sustainable diets

Tesco realized that when it comes to health and sustainable diet, value is key to all shoppers. This is especially true in the current climate. After having conducted a survey, it found that most of its customers want to feed their families healthy food (95 per cent of low affluence responders agreed). However, most people say they cannot buy healthy options because they are too expensive (66 per cent), they are not tasty (52 per cent), and/or preparing it takes too much time (31 per cent). As such, Tesco tried **three successful interventions** to help customers:

- **Better Baskets:** A communication campaign helping customers choose healthier and more sustainable products (via Clubcard prices, prominent locations, point of sales, tv/press, recipe cards)
- **Food to Go:** Offering healthier options through iconic value led deals (great value proposition, tasty and filling, new healthier snacks, substantial salads)
- **Veganuary:** Inspiring customers to try more plant-based foods by making it easier and cheaper to choose them (via comprehensive plan, Clubcard prices, point of sale, online, recipes and swaps, tv/media)

Tesco's key message was that there was no single activity to change customer behaviour; rather, Tesco has succeeded from learning and evolving from its interventional programmes and by continually updating their activities to encourage healthy living.





 **BOX 4**

## Migros Ticaret's promotion of healthy living

As Türkiye's biggest fresh produce seller, Migros has several initiatives that contribute to a healthy and sustainable ecosystem. These initiatives to encourage healthy living include:

- **Well-Being Journey Initiative:** Digital app designed to choose your diet (i.e., vegetarian or vegan) with support to balance your nutrition. The app also includes help with baby nutrition, water prompts, step tracker and teeth brushing reminders.
- **Migros Partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations:** "Right on Time Project" and "Growing Healthy with Migros" both provide healthy living and conscious shopping training to children.

### They focused on:

- Importance of balanced nutrition and balanced nutrition chart
- The benefits of fruits and vegetables
- Control processes undertaken until products reach shelves
- Good agricultural practices
- Tips on reading labels
- The usage of waste collection bins in stores
- Benefits of recycling
- **Migros Family Clubs:** Free vocational and personal development courses in 178 different fields, including healthy living, food hygiene, healthy nutrition, dental care, food waste, etc., reaching 367,745 members and 33 locations in Türkiye.



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