COST, EQUITY AND ACCEPTABILITY OF SOFT DRINKS TAXES TO PREVENT CHILD OBESITY
A NARRATIVE REVIEW

Childhood obesity is rising globally and is predicted to affect 254 million children by 2030 - a 100 million increase in the course of a decade.*

Countries worldwide have committed to a zero increase in obesity by 2025. To meet this commitment, governments are encouraged to promote healthy behaviours and reshape obesogenic environments through a variety of population-wide policies.

Taxing sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) is one such measure. Currently, 37 regional or national governments apply SSB taxes. Health-related taxes aim to decrease the purchase of a product associated with harm to health. They also aim to raise revenues, which may, or may not, be earmarked specifically for health promotion.

While other reviews investigated the effectiveness of SSB taxes for preventing obesity, the current review assessed the cost and cost-effectiveness, equity and acceptability of SSB taxation.

Cost and cost-effectiveness
The implementation of SSB taxes is low cost and highly cost-effective. Transitional costs to companies may arise due to the reformulation of products.

These conclusions are supported by observations from different countries. However, better estimates are desirable about the costs of implementing health taxes or subsidies, and the revenues that may be generated from taxation.

Equity
Evidence suggests that taxes are more effective with high-consumers of targeted products. It appears that the greatest health benefits of taxation accrue to people from lower socio-economic status groups, who tend to be high SSB consumers.

Favourable effects manifest through a reduction in consumption and a reduction in expenditure on the taxed products. Current evidence on the relation between food taxes and social disparities is mainly based on modelling studies and requires further confirmation through case studies.

Acceptability
Actors involved in public health and consumer protection generally favour SSB taxation.

Commercial stakeholders involved in selling foods high in fats, sugars or salt tend to oppose such taxes. This attitude sheds a light on why significant resistance can be expected when such measures are considered.

At the same time, companies have demonstrated the ability to rapidly reformulate and adapt their marketing strategies to meet the challenges of an SSB tax.

Overall, the review concluded that there is sufficient evidence for policy makers to adopt SSB taxation policies to tackle obesogenic food environments.


Find out more about the STOP project here: stopchildobesity.eu
Sugar-sweetened beverage taxes are most accepted by the public if revenues are directly used for health and health promotion.

Future research should focus on:

- Case studies to confirm findings from model studies
- Causal links between price changes and spending patterns and preferences
- Price elasticities assessments for specific population groups
- Peer-reviewed papers on acceptability of SSB taxes

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