

SNE PRESS RELEASE: Demonization of food processing does not help children

Specialised Nutrition Europe (SNE) is committed to addressing all particular nutritional needs and ensuring every child has access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food. We acknowledge UNICEF's recent publication: "*Ultra-Processed Foods and Children*"¹ and welcome the ongoing global dialogue on improving children's nutrition and health.

The secretary general of SNE, Beat Späth, stated:

*"While we appreciate the intention to protect children's health, **demonizing food processing does not help**. Many foods are processed for very good reasons. Processing is essential to guarantee microbiological safety, nutrient adequacy, accessibility and shelf stability. This is especially the case for many specialised nutrition products, including for infants and young children. Without processing, our sector would not be able to provide much-needed products for people with specific nutritional needs."*

SNE emphasizes that there is **no universally accepted definition for the term 'ultra-processed'** and the much-referenced proposed classification system of so-called 'ultra-processed foods' lacks scientific consensus, is imprecise and confusing. **Leading nutrition bodies in Europe reject this concept**². SNE supports initiatives to establish a science-based food classification system, as proposed for Codex Alimentarius at the global level, and as proposed by FoodDrinkEurope³.

Regarding UNICEF's take **on foods for infants and young children, SNE notes that there are very strict, science-based EU regulations**, ensuring inter alia the adequate composition in terms of:

- Nutrition: for instance, baby foods have strict limits in sodium levels.
- Ingredients and additives (for example: colorings and sweeteners are forbidden)⁴.
- An extremely high level of food safety⁵, e.g., limits up to 500 times stricter than general foods regarding pesticides.
- And restrictions on advertising with the intention to protect breastfeeding. The use of nutrition & health claims is also strictly regulated.

While UNICEF suggests that follow-up and young child formulas are "non-necessary", it is important to recall the recommendations of the leading medical societies regarding the need to continue breastfeeding or formula until at least one year of age⁶. Young child formula is also recognized by government institutions in several EU Member States and by leading pediatric societies as a useful tool to increase intakes of nutrient at risk of deficiency, incl iron and essential fatty acids⁷.

Finally, SNE acknowledges the recommendation to reduce sugar intake across most population groups. The contents of infant and follow-on formula are strictly regulated in the EU and many other regions, including for lactose. But unfortunately, this is not the case for young child formula. The President of SNE, Marie-France Pagerey emphasized: **'We therefore renew our call to the EU institutions to finally regulate the composition of young child formula'**⁸. We also support ongoing work at CODEX level to update standards related to cereal-based and other baby foods, to ensure composition criteria reflecting latest knowledge on infant and young children nutrition. '

¹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Ultra-processed Foods and Children State-of-the-art review. (2025).

² [UK](#), [Nordics](#), and [France](#)

³ FoodDrinkEurope suggests the development of a robust EU-wide system for food consumption and composition data, ensuring that policy decisions are based on harmonised, real-world information, in line with the European Commission's Vision for Agriculture and Food, which emphasises dialogue on issues such as dietary intake data collection: Source: [FoodDrinkEurope's contribution to the call for evidence for the EU Cardiovascular Health Plan](#)

⁴ Additives are strictly regulated in the EU, especially for products for infants and young children. For details on additives in infant formula, see for example this [ISDI brochure](#). Furthermore, in the EU, artificial sweeteners are generally prohibited in all foods for infants and young children.

⁵ SNE factsheet ["Baby Foods – ensuring the highest safety standards"](#)

⁶ European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology & Nutrition (ESPGHAN) et al., 2025. Position Statement: World Health Organization (WHO) guideline on the complementary feeding of infants and young children aged 6–23 months 2023: [A multisociety response](#).

⁷ including ESPGHAN, the French and the German Paediatric Association). For detail, please see [SNE's Young Child Formula Factsheet](#) (available in various languages).

⁸ Specialised Nutrition Europe (SNE). [SNE and EDA call for specific rules on Young Child Formula](#). (2025).

Additional information:

- Existing approaches and policies in Europe to promote healthy diets include inter alia educational and awareness-raising programmes, food reformulation and school food programmes. In many cases the food industry is involved as a partner⁹.
- Discover why foods for infants and young children contain carbohydrates/sugars in a relevant factsheet from SNE's global partner association ISDI!¹⁰
- For examples for food processing steps in the production of specialised nutrition, please see [SNE factsheets on food processing](#) & [ISDI resources on food processing](#), as well as our article '[When babies need processed foods](#)'.
- To know more about the benefits of food processing in general, please consult, for example, [EUFIC's website section on food processing](#).
- For the food industry's detailed take on the debate about so-called 'ultra-processed' foods, please refer to the following FoodDrinkEurope publications, which SNE supports: [Food Processing Q&A](#), [Position: Ultra-Processed Foods](#), [Scientific critique of 'ultra-processed foods' classifications](#), SNE podcast 'Nutritalks', episode 4, with Bo Dohmen from FoodDrinkEurope
- Infant formula is intended for infants aged 0-6 months, follow on formula for older infants aged 6-12 months, and young child formula for young children aged 12-36 months.

About SNE:

Specialised Nutrition Europe (SNE) is the trade association representing the interests of the specialised nutrition industry across Europe. Foods covered by the specialised nutrition sector are tailor-made dietary solutions for populations with very specific nutritional needs including infants & young children, patients under medical supervision, sportspeople, overweight and obese consumers, and those suffering from coeliac disease. EU Transparency Register: 33498019160-40.

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⁹ For a selective listing of initiatives by and with the European food industry, please see [FoodDrinkEurope's contribution to the call for evidence for the Cardiovascular Health Plan](#).

¹⁰ ISDI [Factsheet: Carbohydrates and Sugars in Foods for Infants and Young Children](#).