

	safefood Research
Research Administration Manual	Section: Part 1
Type of Research: Commissioned and Non-commissioned Research	Sheet No.: Page 1 of 6
Process: To be completed by safefood Specialist	Issue No.: 1.4
	Issue Date: 22/02/2021
Form Type: Tender Information Document	Issued By: Director Food Science



RESEARCH TENDER CALL

TENDER INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Project Reference No.: 04-2021

Project Title: Reducing the exposure of children and adolescents to digital marketing of unhealthy foods:

- a) **How can the World Health Organisation 'CLICK' framework be implemented on an island of Ireland context?**
- b) **Can the rights of the child to a safe and healthy diet provide a new approach to the regulation of digital marketing of unhealthy foods to children?**

1. Objective/Knowledge Gap

The link between childhood obesity and promotion of unhealthy foods has been conclusively proved. The full extent of children and adolescent's exposure to digital marketing of foods high in saturated fat, salt and free sugars (HFSS foods) on the island of Ireland is unknown. Digital marketing allows children to be inappropriately exposed to foods such as breakfast, soft drinks, confectionary and fast food that are advertised as everyday products, when healthy eating guidelines recommended consumption rarely or in small quantities. The current proposal has two main aims:

1.1 To implement the WHO CLICK framework on an IOI context

- Review the regulatory environment for digital marketing of unhealthy food to children and adolescents on the island of Ireland (IOI) (NI and ROI separately), including industry self-regulation
- Map the global, regional and national digital marketing ecosystem and children's website/app usage.
- Gauge children and adolescents and parents/guardians' experience and awareness of marketing techniques and campaigns.
- Assess campaigns run by leading brands by collecting information from advertising agencies and by sampling whole country social media for relevant content to ascertain what is viewed by different age groups
- Use real-time screen capture software on a panel subgroup to assess what a representative sample of children actually see online on their devices, in order to better understand wider marketing techniques, including user-generated content and product placement.
- Develop recommendations for the implementation of Step 5 of the CLICK framework, i.e. create user-friendly materials from the research data and develop partnerships with young people, parents, policy-makers and civil society, who together can advocate change, raise awareness and influence policy on the IOI.

1.2 To review international best practice on the use of international human rights instruments to support the adoption of responsible digital marketing of foods to children

- Explore the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) that ensures the protection of children from marketing that could negatively impact on health
- Identify the strengths and limitations of the regulatory environment for digital marketing of unhealthy food in terms of the rights of the child on the IOI
- Qualitative assessment of attitudes, knowledge and behaviour of children, adolescents, and parents/guardians to addressing marketing of unhealthy food to children as a children's safeguarding issue in the IOI
- Identify best practice approaches for incorporation of protections for children in the digital marketing of unhealthy food on the IOI.

2. **Background**

The latest evidence shows that children are frequently exposed to digital marketing of foods and drinks high in saturated fat, salt and free sugars (HFSS) and one of the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity (1) is to reduce children’s exposure to all such marketing. In order to progress this recommendation, the WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases with the support of Member States, developed a tool to monitor the digital marketing of unhealthy products to children; this tool, the CLICK monitoring framework, is flexible and can be easily adjusted to national context (2).

The WHO also advocates that children should be supported and empowered to engage in the digital world to fulfil their rights to information and participation under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (3). In 2021, the European Commission published the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. The thematic Area 2 of this strategy details that: “socio-economic inclusion, health and education: An EU that fights child poverty, promotes inclusive and child-friendly societies, health and education systems” provides for ensuring the rights of all children to health through “the development of best practices and a voluntary code of conduct to reduce digital marketing to children of products high in sugar, fat and salt within the Joint Action on Implementation of Validated Best Practices in Nutrition”. The Thematic Area 5 focused on “Digital and information society: An EU where children can safely navigate the digital environment and harness its opportunities” also mentions the protection of children from harmful marketing by emphasising the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) (4). **safefood** is commissioning this research to explore these two approaches (CLICK framework and children’s rights) to tackle the digital marketing of HFSS foods and drinks to inform our work and to support the work of our stakeholders.

3. Approach

It is proposed that the aims of the project will be achieved through a mixed methods approach and it is expected that the researchers will intentionally integrate or combine these methods to draw on the strengths of each e.g. allow one method to inform the other and allow one method to provide deeper insights into the findings of another.

4. Technical Specification

(a) Scope of research

The research should:

- focus on children (2 to 12 years of age) and adolescents (13 to 18 years of age)
- ensure that those who participate in the qualitative work are representative of population in terms social class, age, region and rural/urban

- have sufficient sample size and data (if feasible) to represent each jurisdiction (Northern Ireland and Ireland) separately as well as on an island of Ireland basis. The purpose of the research is not to determine differences between jurisdictions but rather to provide regional data
- be collaborative across a number of relevant disciplines including experts in HFSS food marketing (its effects and regulation), public health, digital marketing, child rights, digital law and other relevant fields as this is an emerging, trans-disciplinary field

It should be noted that **safefood** is not an active participant in the project and sole responsibility lies with the successful tenderer

(b) Literature review

The literature review should include peer reviewed publications and a full search of the grey literature including government and other organization reports, and conference proceeding etc. Detail must be provided in regard to how the literature review will be structured and completed along with quality assurance mechanisms e.g. review by more than one researcher.

(b) Qualitative and quantitative research

A full justification and rationale for the proposed methodology and analytical approach will be required. It will be necessary to indicate for all aspects of the project how the proposed data will be collected, analysed and reported. The research should be mixed in nature. The contractor is responsible for developing and piloting any topic guide which will be used to facilitate the qualitative discussions. The contractor is encouraged to use tools such as vignettes or visual aids to facilitate a more relevant and open discussion for the participants.

(c) Outline of proposed data sources

For this study, different data sources will be required. The researcher must enumerate the sources they intend to use and demonstrate access and experience in the use of the proposed data sources, as well as the relevant permissions to do so.

(d) Analysis

A full and detailed methodology must be provided on how the data sources are going to be utilised, analysed and interpreted to meet the objectives of the project.

(e) Data handling and Reporting

- The contractor will submit to **safefood**, on a six-monthly basis, an interim report containing details of the progress for each deliverable of the project.
- The contractor is responsible for collating all results and a final report will be submitted to **safefood** on completion of the study.
- All forms, documentation and electronic files must be retained by the contractor until further notice for **safefood** in case of issues arising after the completion of the research.

(f) Quality assurance

- Ethical approval will be an essential component where data collection from participants is involved.
- The contractor will use validated methods where applicable and will apply best practice quality controls to approaches.
- To ensure transparency and reproducibility, all data sources used in the research must be specified, and all data used must be explicitly specified and justified.
- **safefood** may visit the contractors during the course of the research to assess how the work is being carried out.

5. Proposed Activities/Deliverables

- Submission, on a 6-monthly basis, of interim reports on progress.
- Analysis of the final dataset, collation of the results and a final report to be submitted to **safefood** at the end of the 24-month study period.
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6. Evaluation of Tenders

Tender bids will be evaluated according to the quality of proposals and applicants using the following criteria:

Quality of the proposal:

- ✓ Anticipated deliverables;
- ✓ Research method and facilities;
- ✓ Value for money;
- ✓ Potential for application;
- ✓ Work plan, including the overall timeframe.

Quality of Applicants:

- ✓ Experience in subject area;
- ✓ Quality Assurance and Quality Control measures in place.

7. Duration of Project

Estimated duration of the project: Total of 24 months. A detailed timescale of research should be submitted by the applicant.

8. Tender Application Forms and Guidelines

The Tender Application Form and associated Guidelines can be downloaded from www.safefood.net/research-tender. They can also be obtained by emailing research@safefood.net quoting the project reference number. Alternatively, please contact **safefood** as per the details below.

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The closing date for receipt of applications by **safefood** is no later than **4pm on Friday 8th October 2021**.

References

1. Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016
2. Monitoring and restricting digital marketing of unhealthy products to children and adolescents. Moscow: World Health Organization; 2019
3. A child-rights based approach to food marketing: a guide for policy makers. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018
4. EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Brussels: European Commission 2021