

The role of nutritional labelling and signposting from a European perspective

Across the European Union, there is a legal requirement to provide information on food labels. There are two key food legislations that need to be considered: the Food Information for Consumers Regulation and the Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation. This paper “summarises developments in nutrition labelling information and signposting, the legislation that controls on-pack declarations, and research conducted to assess whether the information used, understood and supports healthier choices.” It also gives some recommendations of what could be done to promote behaviour change.

In 2006, the European Union adopted a Regulation on the use of Nutrition and Health Claims to harmonise the use of health or nutritional claims of foodstuffs. The legislation also established a process to define the scientific validity of different claims and states that health claims will not be allowed unless all the nutrient profiling criteria are met. A couple of years later, in 2011, the Food Information for Consumers Regulation was implemented to specify the type of information that must be placed on food labels. In 2016 the provision of back-of-pack nutrition information became mandatory and includes the list of all the ingredients.

Food labelling regulations were designed to “inform the public about the ingredient and nutrient composition of foods and to protect the public from misleading claims or claims not supported by sound scientific evidence.” Despite increasing access to information regarding food labelling, governments and other organisations have the ability to do more to ensure wider implementation of nutritional claims and clarify the information provided by these labels for the general public.

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