Healthy food subsidies and unhealthy food taxation: A systematic review of the evidence

Non-communicable diseases represent a considerable threat, as they account for over 60% of deaths. Of these, it is estimated that 40% are attributable to dietary factors. Governments are increasingly attempting to implement dietary interventions, among which food subsidies and taxation are gaining momentum. This systematic review includes 78 studies which have consistent evidence showing that taxes and subsidies influence dietary behaviours.

The articles included in this review provide moderately strong evidence that food price policies can be effective in impacting populations’ dietary behaviours. The majority of studies included emphasised the effectiveness of increasing the consumption of healthier foods and lowering purchases of food high in fat, sodium and sugar. Niebyski et al. states that to increase the effectiveness of these policies, both taxes and subsidies should not be lower than 10% to 15% and used jointly. The research however acknowledges the need to consider, in future research, socio-economic inequalities in nutrition as a consequence from changes in food prices. While the evidence highlights food pricing strategies as valuable dietary interventions, there remains a growing need to perform longer-term studies at the population level.