



Companies that make formulas and foods for infants and young children urged to implement long-standing WHO recommendations on responsible marketing

Utrecht, The Netherlands, 17th June 2021 Access to Nutrition Initiative (ATNI) has launched its fourth comprehensive assessment of the marketing policies and practices of the world's largest manufacturers of formulas and foods for infants and young children.¹ Despite the World Health Assembly (WHA) adopting 'The International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes' forty years ago and passing 18 associated resolutions since (collectively referred to as 'The Code'), the [BMS/CF Marketing Index 2021](#) found that none of the companies it assessed fully abides by The Code's recommendations and most fall well short.

The nine companies assessed are: Abbott, China Feihe Limited, China Mengniu Dairy Company Limited, Danone, Inner Mongolia Yili Industrial Group, The KraftHeinz Company, Koninklijke FrieslandCampina, Nestlé S.A. and Reckitt. In 2019, these companies accounted for global sales in the baby food segment of nearly US\$38 billion and 52% of the market, combined.

"Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, there was resounding evidence that increasing breastfeeding rates around the world to near universal levels could prevent 823,000 deaths in children younger than five years old each year²" said **Inge Kauer, Executive Director of ATNI**. *"The pandemic has underlined the importance of breastfeeding in providing babies with natural immunity to Covid-19, as well as many other communicable and non-communicable diseases over their lifetimes³."*

The marketing of breast-milk substitutes has been shown by extensive independent research to be one of the factors that undermines women's choice to breastfeed.⁴ Brands must play their part by marketing their products responsibly and in line with The Code, so that women can make informed decisions about how to feed their children. It is particularly important that companies make this commitment because, so far, only 31 countries have a legal framework that substantially implements The Code.

"We are making two calls based on the results of our Index," **comments Kauer**. *"One is for governments to do more to curtail the inappropriate marketing of breast-milk substitutes and promotion of foods for infants and young children. Those governments that have not yet done so must urgently embed The Code fully into law, to create a level-playing field for all companies, and not just those we have assessed. The second call is to baby food companies themselves. They have a clear opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to mothers' and babies' health by closing the substantial gaps between The Code and their current marketing policies and practices. They need to act quickly if they are to contribute to realizing the WHO nutrition targets by 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals by 2030"* **Kauer concludes**.

"The findings of this report again illustrate that the world's largest baby food manufacturers fall well short of complying with global health policy, despite having had 40 years to do so" added **Laurence Grummer-Strawn, Unit Head in the Department of Nutrition and Food Safety at the World Health Organization**. *"These companies claim that they support breastfeeding, but in reality, their policies and practices continue to ignore The Code that exists to protect breastfeeding. The progress documented in the report is good news, but also demonstrates significant gaps that must urgently be addressed. It is time for all baby food companies to demonstrate a commitment to improving the health of babies and young children the world over by aligning their actions to The Code."*

¹ Formulas are referred to by The Code as breast-milk substitutes (BMS). Those marketed as suitable for infants from birth to three years of age are included in the scope of ATNI's research. The types of foods for infants and young children within scope are those marketed as suitable from six to 36 months of age. They are called complementary foods CF - a term that includes both food and beverage products.

² <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/about/benefits-of-breastfeeding/>

³ <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/breastfeeding-and-covid-19>

⁴ P. Baker et al., 'First-food systems transformations and the ultra-processing of infant and young child diets: The determinants, dynamics and consequences of the global rise in commercial milk formula consumption' (2020) *Maternal & Child Nutrition*. e13097. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.13097>

Results and rankings

The BMS/CF Marketing Index 2021 is the only independent assessment of the extent to which the world's biggest makers of formulas and foods for infants and young children market their products in line with The Code. It scores and ranks companies based on their policies, internal systems and disclosure of information, as well as 'on-the-ground' assessments of their marketing practices. The full findings are available [here](#).

While the scores indicate some improvement since 2018, all companies still have a lot to do to align their marketing practices with The Code in order not to undermine breastfeeding and to give babies and young children the best start in life. The Index highlights are that:

- **Danone** retained first place with a score of 68%, up from its 2018 score of 46%
- **Nestlé**, the market leader in sales value, retained its second place with a score of 57% – also a substantial improvement on its score of 45% in 2018
- **KraftHeinz** achieved the greatest improvement, ranking third, with a score of 38% compared to in 2018 when it didn't score at all
- **Reckitt** (previously RB) substantially improved its BMS Marketing policies which led to a big jump in its score from 10% in 2018 to 32% in 2021 and climbing one place to fourth in the ranking.

The vast global reach of the companies assessed in the Index means they influence millions of mothers and caregivers. As a result, they also impact the health of millions of infants and young children, placing substantial responsibility on these companies to market their products in line with WHO's recommendations.

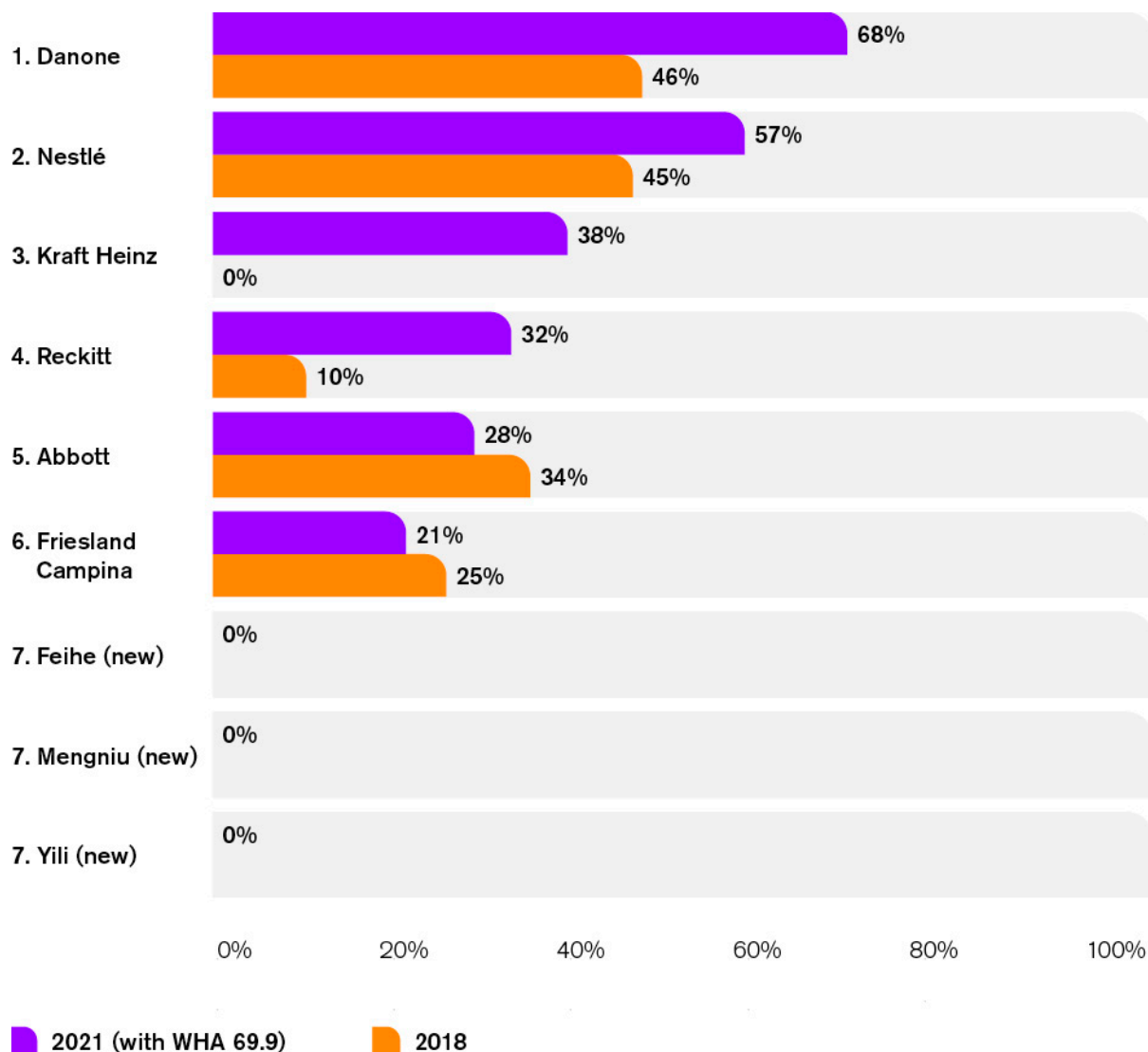
While some of the companies' policies align to some extent to The Code, most make significant exclusions in relation to certain products and markets. For example, the policies of six companies that ATNI was able to assess all exclude growing-up milks and complementary foods from their scope. No company applies The Code's recommendations in full, globally. Moreover, none of the six companies that make foods for infants and young children have extended their policies to incorporate guidance on ending inappropriate marketing of these products, to bring those policies into line with guidance published by the WHO in 2016 and endorsed by the WHA of that year when passing Resolution 69.9.

ENDS



FURTHER NOTES TO EDITORS

BMS/CF Marketing Index 2021 Final Ranking



About Access to Nutrition Initiative:

ATNI is an independent, not-for-profit organization established in 2013. It publishes independent, comprehensive analysis and commentary on companies' efforts to improve consumers' access to nutritious foods and beverages, both globally and within specific markets. Assessing producers of breast-milk substitutes and complementary foods is an integral part of ATNI's work. In the course of its research, ATNI collaborates with a wide range of stakeholders, including the investment community, to ensure that its Indexes and reports are a useful tool as they engage with and invest in companies.

About the BMS/CF Marketing Index 2021:

In 2013, 2016 and 2018 ATNI published Global Access to Nutrition Index reports which incorporated analysis and commentary in relation to marketing policies and practices of the world's six largest baby food companies. For the first time in 2021, to place greater emphasis on, and bring greater attention to, the critical importance of the health and nutrition of infants and young children, ATNI is publishing this analysis separately as the BMS/CF Marketing Index 2021. The methodology for this Index was based on the one used in 2018, revised based on stakeholder consultation and to reflect all World Health Assembly (WHA)



resolutions, associated guidance and prevailing recommendations, most prominently the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (The Code). A score of 100% on the Index would mean that a company has achieved full compliance with The Code in terms of policy and practice in the two countries where it was assessed.

The number of manufacturers of breast-milk substitutes and complementary foods included within the Index has been increased from six to nine to provide a more complete picture of these major players' marketing policies and practices around the world. Together they accounted for over 50% of global sales in this sector in 2019.

The nine companies included in the BMS/CF Marketing Index 2021 are: Abbott, China Feihe Limited, China Mengniu Dairy Company Limited, Danone, Inner Mongolia Yili Industrial Group, The KraftHeinz Company, Koninklijke FrieslandCampina, Nestlé S.A. and Reckitt.⁵ Nestlé is the market leader with sales of over US\$15 billion from this segment in 2019. Danone had the second highest sales in 2019 of US\$ 8.5 billion. Further market share and sales figures are presented in the Index report.

Six of the companies included in this Index (Danone, FrieslandCampina, Kraft Heinz, Mengniu, Nestlé, and Yili) are also included in the Global Access to Nutrition Index 2021. Their scores in the Global Index will again reflect their scores on this Index.

The findings of this 2021 Index regarding companies' compliance with The Code rely to a large extent on information shared by companies, in addition to information that is available in the public domain. Several factors beyond the companies' control may impact the availability of information such as differences in disclosure requirements among countries or capacity constraints within companies due to, among other factors, the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, in the case of limited or no engagement by such companies, this Index may not represent the full extent of their efforts.

The Index was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the governments of the United Kingdom through FCDO and the Netherlands through DGIS.

About the BMS Call to Action

The Call to Action was issued in June 2020 by WHO, UNICEF, Save the Children, Helen Keller Intl, FHI Solutions, FHI 360 and BRAC. It was directed to all companies that manufacture baby formula globally and was sent directly to the CEOs of 21 companies. It called on BMS manufacturers to make unambiguous, measurable commitments to align their marketing policies and practices with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions (together referred to as the Code). The individual company responses, an evaluation of the responses and the signatories' statements in reaction to those responses can be found on the [BMS Call to Action website](#). ATNI supported the Call to Action by providing to the signatories an evaluation of the responses of the 17 companies received.

⁵ Reckitt is the new name for the company previously known as RB up to March 2021. Prior to that it was listed in ATNI reports as RB/Mead Johnson Nutrition because it had acquired Mead Johnson Nutrition (MJN) in 2017.

