



ACCESS TO
NUTRITION
INITIATIVE

ATNI SPOTLIGHT ON

LOBBYING 2022

Benchmarking the nutrition-related lobbying commitments, management systems, and disclosure of food and beverage manufacturers

DECEMBER 2022





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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of Irish Aid.

This report was prepared by ATNI with the support of Carnstone: Will Sharp (lead author and researcher, ATNI), and Sameea Sheikh (project manager, ATNI), and Daniel Witte and Blake Zheng (research, analysis, and writing support, Carnstone).

ATNI wishes to thank the team at Studio Vrijdag for the design, and Wren Media for copy-editing the report.

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Pages: Cover, p.7, p.11, p.17, p.21, p.23, p.29, p.38, p.39, p.43, p.44

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATNI	Access to Nutrition Initiative	NDA	Non-Disclosure Agreement
BMS	Breast-milk substitutes	OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
AUM	Assets under management	NPC	National People's Congress (China)
ABC	Anti-Bribery and Corruption	RLF	Responsible Lobbying Framework
CGF	The Consumer Goods Forum	CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
the Code	International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes	SBN	SUN Business Network
ESG	Environment, Social, and Governance	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
F&B	Food and beverage	N4G	Nutrition4Growth
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization	SSBs	sugar-sweetened beverages
FBDGs	Food-based dietary guidelines	SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
FOP	Front-of-pack (labeling)	UN	United Nations
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism	UNFSS	UN Food Systems Summit
IFBA	International Food and Beverage Alliance	USDA	US Department of Agriculture
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Country	WHO	World Health Organization
NCDs	non-communicable diseases		
NGO	non-governmental organization		

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Executive Summary



The World Health Organization (WHO) and public health advocates worldwide have long championed a range of policy measures to curb the proliferation of obesity and other diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as stricter front-of-pack (FOP) labelling requirements, restrictions on marketing unhealthy foods to children, and fiscal measures (such as sugar taxes).

However, the private sector, which includes well-resourced and politically-active food and beverage (F&B) manufacturers, has been observed repeatedly deploying a range of means – both directly and collectively (through trade associations) – to obstruct, prevent, or weaken such proposals where they arise. At the same time, a growing number of these companies have been committing to support public health and nutrition in their missions and strategies, and state a desire to level the playing-field and see sector-wide progress.

ATNI has been commissioned to benchmark the world's 25 largest F&B companies' lobbying-related commitments, management systems, and disclosure against the [Responsible Lobbying Framework \(RLF\)](#). The RLF was developed to help organizations adopt corporate practices that ensure their lobbying activities are **legitimate, transparent, consistent, and accountable**, while providing the **opportunity** for other, more resource-constrained groups, to lobby in the public interest. Please note, this report focuses on the quality of internal corporate practices, rather than assessing real-life examples of how companies are influencing nutrition policy; while scrutiny of the latter is essential (examples are provided in Box 1), it is beyond the scope of this report.

Report rationale

The aim of this report is to encourage F&B manufacturers to improve their corporate practices relevant to lobbying: setting high-level lobbying **commitments**; translating these into action through effective **management systems**; being open and transparent through comprehensive **disclosure**; and thereby lobbying more responsibly.

This research identifies areas of strengths and weaknesses for companies, both individually and collectively, and encourages peer-to-peer learning by identifying best practices. Practical suggestions are provided for improvement, starting with the 'easy wins', before recommending more fundamental improvements.

By providing objective and comparable data, key stakeholders, especially investors, can use the results to engage with the companies to improve their practices.

Research process:

Companies were assessed on [35 indicators adapted from the 22 sub-principles of the RLF](#) (with particular emphasis on lobbying in relation to WHO-endorsed measures).

Our research focused on three areas: Policy commitments (eight indicators), Management systems (eight indicators), and Disclosure (19 indicators). 'Multipliers' were added to some to take geographical scope and completeness into account.

Only publicly available information was used. All companies were given the opportunity to review and respond once to the initial assessments.

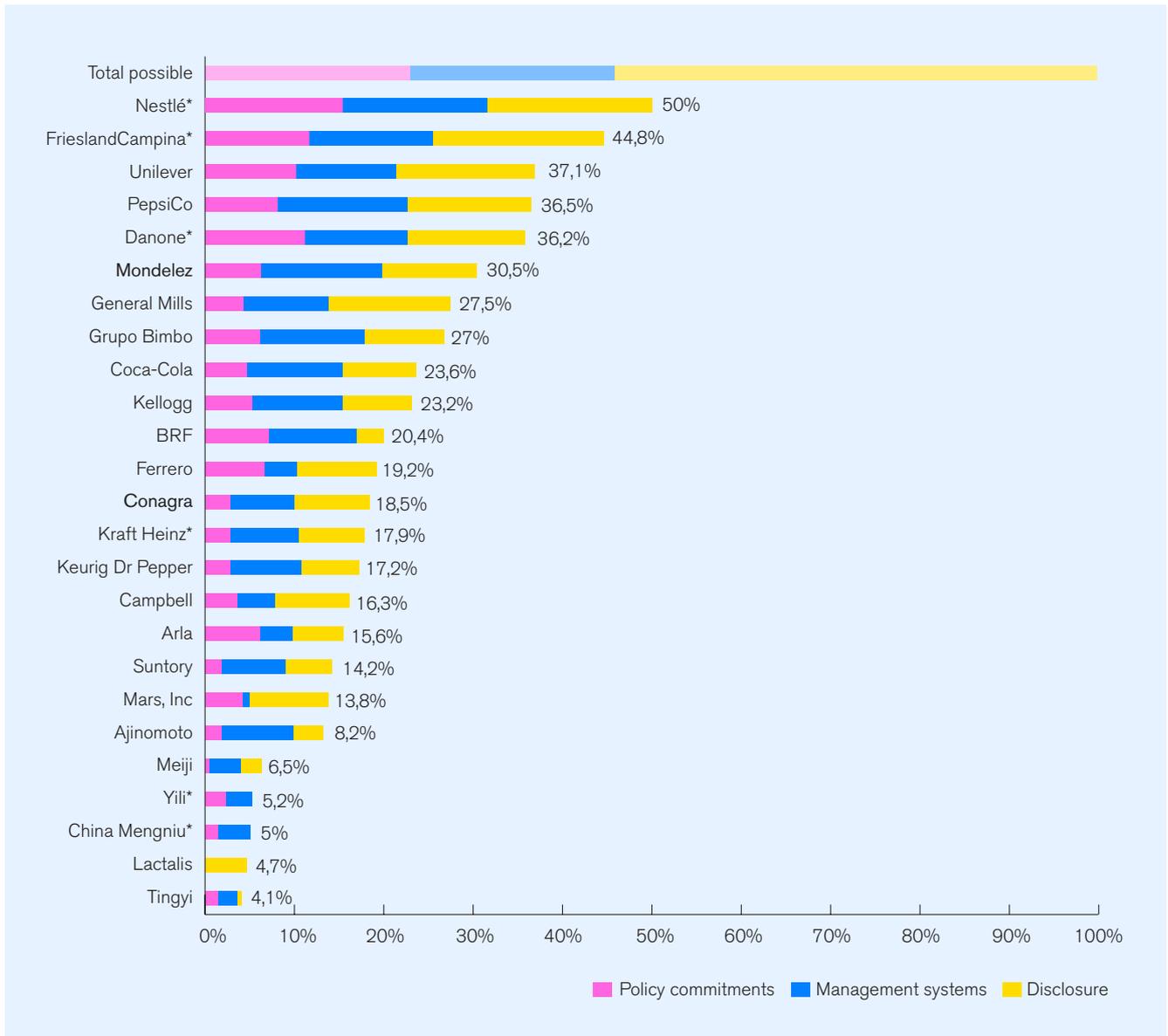
The ultimate goal is that companies adopt all principles in the RLF. By doing so, in combination with increased stakeholder scrutiny and accountability, it is expected that companies will use their political power more responsibly, limiting the lobbying excesses and abuses that have been so frequently observed over the last few decades, and ultimately contribute to better public health policy.

Results

When assessed against the RLF, the average score achieved was 21% across all 25 companies, with individual scores ranging from 3% to 50% (as shown in Figure 1 below). While there is wide variation in company maturity on the subject, **current practice is far from the standard set in the RLF**. This is especially the case for Disclosure, with only two companies scoring over 30%, while Management systems and Disclosure relating to trade associations was also a significant shortcoming.

Given the aspirational nature of the Framework, these results are to be expected. Since this is a relatively new standard and 'responsible lobbying' is an emerging concept, even for established multinational companies, the framework was deliberately intended to provide a best practice benchmark that encourages companies to aim high. Therefore, **these results represent a baseline from which companies are expected to progress**.

Figure 1: Company scores



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Key findings:

- **Encouragingly, best practices were identified for most indicators** – meaning that, were companies to emulate their peers' current practices (as a pre-competitive issue), near-full compliance with the RLF is already within reach.
- **No companies' lobbying disclosures were global in coverage and complete.** Many disclosures appear to be compliance-led – meaning they are made through lobbying transparency registers as a prerequisite for accessing policymakers (although this information is sometimes also disclosed voluntarily on companies' own domains).
- However, few disclosures were found for markets that do not require such disclosures, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).
- **No companies disclose comprehensive and global lists of trade association memberships, nor provide information beyond such lists** – such as lobbying dues paid, Board seats held, the purpose of these memberships, engagement examples, and lobbying activities undertaken. Stakeholders, therefore, have limited understanding of what kinds of lobbying is being undertaken on behalf of the company, and that the company is tacitly endorsing.

- **Very few companies state that they review their relationships with trade associations systematically and at Board-level**, or outline specific measures taken in cases of disagreement. This indicates that they do not consider the prospect that these may lobby in ways or with positions contrary to the companies' to be a significant risk.
- **Exposure to the RLF can lead to improvements.** While the results are not directly comparable, three out of five of the leading companies had been previously benchmarked against the RLF as part of [the Spotlight on Lobbying 2021: BMS Companies](#) – indicating that these companies had already made progress on aligning their practices with the RLF.

Going forward

Companies are strongly encouraged to **review and adopt the practical recommendations** set out in the report. These include 'easy wins' in addition to more fundamental changes in practice applicable to all companies assessed, alongside customized recommendations detailed in the individual [company scorecards](#).

Investors and other stakeholders are encouraged to use these findings to **engage with companies to act on these recommendations** and apply consistent pressure on them to increase transparency and change their practices in accordance with the RLF.

ATNI hopes to repeat the benchmark in the coming years in order to measure progress and drive further action on this topic. In addition, it will use these findings to engage with companies to facilitate peer-to-peer learning, understand their challenges, and identify barriers to progress.

ATNI also seeks to engage with the wider stakeholder community on exploring new ways to foster accountability on this topic. Key to this is consolidating the evidence-base on lobbying by the F&B industry, connecting the various initiatives active on this topic, and moving towards tracking it systematically: a strong evidence-base is crucial to bridging the gap in perspectives and understanding between industry, public health advocates, investors, policymakers, and wider civil society.

While nothing is stopping companies from increasing their disclosure voluntarily, the findings demonstrate that mandatory lobbying disclosure requirements remain the key driver of transparency on this topic. Therefore, *all* actors – industry, investors, and the wider stakeholder community – are encouraged to join **calls for policymakers to develop or improve legislation around lobbying disclosure** at country-level.

1. Introduction

Lobbying: “Any direct or indirect communication with public officials, political decision makers or representatives for the purposes of influencing public decision making and carried out by or on behalf of any organized group.”¹

– Transparency International's definition of lobbying



1.1 Context

1.1.1 Lobbying

The practice of lobbying is an important part of the policy-making process.² Allowing stakeholders to present their perspectives, data, and expertise, can contribute to better legislation, regulations, and standards by providing policymakers with a richer understanding of the (potential) impact of (proposed) policies on the ground. Meanwhile, when aligned with the public interest, this approach has the potential to drive stronger and more effective policy action on key sustainability and societal issues, achieving sector-wide impact and levelling the playing field for all.

However, lobbying does not always work this way in practice. Well-resourced interests can obtain access more easily, frequently, and effectively than other stakeholders, meaning their views have a disproportionate impact on public policy development. The result can be that policy outcomes reflect narrower interests at the expense of the wider public good. In a recent report, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) concluded that:

“The abuse of lobbying practices – such as the monopoly of influence by special interest groups, undue influence through covert or deceptive evidence, or the manipulation of public opinion – can result in suboptimal policies and outcomes. An analysis of 300 academic studies showed that such abuse has led, for example, to negative health outcomes, inaction on climate policies, excessive regulation to protect incumbents, or insufficient regulation to correct market failures or distortions. In addition, the abuse of lobbying practices undermines citizens’ trust in democratic processes.”³

1.1.2 Lobbying and the food and beverage manufacturing industry

Lobbying by the F&B industry has been cited as an obstacle in passing much-needed public policy changes to address the growing burden of obesity and other diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) at the national level around the world.⁴

In 2018, just 25 companies accounted for a quarter (24%) of global processed foods and drinks sales,⁵ constituting a concentrated and powerful group which could exert substantial political influence on national governments, especially as valuable providers of tax revenue, employment, and exports in many markets in which they operate.⁶ With the resources to employ skilled lobbyists, make use of the “revolving door” (when former government officials are employed as lobbyists and vice versa), and make political contributions to political parties, companies can gain disproportionate access to policymakers, especially when compared to the more resource-constrained public health advocacy organizations.⁷ For example, in the US alone, the food and beverage industry spends an average of \$58 million a year on lobbying (since 2010), spent \$53 million on political contributions in 2020, and employ as many as 628 lobbyists, 67% of which are ‘door revolvers’, according to OpenSecrets.org.⁸

Key policies such as stricter front-of-pack (FOP) labelling requirements, restrictions on marketing unhealthy foods to children, and fiscal measures (e.g. sugar taxes) have been championed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and public health advocates worldwide for their positive impact on public health (see Box 1). However, F&B manufacturers often view such policy measures as threats to their profitability, by potentially raising costs and/or impeding sales, and therefore deploy a range of means, both directly and collectively (through trade associations), to prevent or weaken such measures.

Box 1: Key policy measures to address obesity and diet-related NCDs subject to F&B industry lobbying

The four main public policy measures (listed below) were selected given their clear endorsement by WHO,⁹ and the frequency in which they appear in recent academic literature on the corporate political activity of the F&B industry around the world.

Fiscal measures to address obesity, including taxes on sugary products:

Given the clear link between over-consumption of sugar and obesity (and other diet-related NCDs, such as diabetes), taxes on sugary products, especially sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), feature prominently here.¹⁰ WHO estimates that a tax on sugary drinks which rises prices by 20% can lead to a reduction in consumption of around 20%, while there is evidence this figure is more pronounced for low-income consumers.¹¹

11 As of 2022, 85 WHO Member States (44%) had implemented SSB taxes, more than double since 2016.¹² While less common, taxation can also be used to limit consumption of other nutrients of concern, such as products high in salt and fat: as of 2022, 29 Member States implemented national level taxes on food products high in salt, sugar, and/or fat.¹³ Meanwhile, subsidies for foods that contribute to a healthy diet can also be considered, although relatively few countries currently have these in place.¹⁴

Nevertheless, industry opposition to such fiscal measures, especially SSB taxes, is commonplace, likely due to their negative impact on demand for affected products.¹⁵ Studies have found evidence of industry lobbying on this topic in a diverse range of contexts, including Brazil,¹⁶ the EU,¹⁷ Ireland,¹⁸ South Africa,¹⁹ Thailand,²⁰ Uganda,²¹ and the US.²²

Mandatory restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy foods (especially to children):

The disproportionate marketing of unhealthy foods is a key driver of obesity and other diet-related NCDs, especially among children;²³ as such, policy measures to restrict this are high on WHO's agenda.²⁴ Moreover, there is evidence from around the world, including Chile, Ireland, South Korea, the UK, Canada, and Australia, that regulations on marketing to children do have positive outcomes on children's health, while also questioning the effectiveness of self-regulatory initiatives in this regard.²⁵

At the same time, the F&B industry is frequently cited as lobbying in opposition to such measures when proposals arise,²⁶ including evidence from Colombia,²⁷ Canada,²⁸ and the UK.²⁹

Mandatory (interpretive) Front-of-Pack (FOP) labelling:

FOP labelling, particularly systems that are interpretive in nature, can assist consumers in understanding the content of food products and guide them towards healthier options, in turn, companies are incentivized to (re)formulate their products and compete on 'healthiness'.³⁰ While many government-endorsed voluntary systems exist, using regulation to make them mandatory, levels the industry playing field and expands the impact of a FOP system. The WHO therefore recommends mandatory FOP labelling as a key measure to address obesity and diet related NCDs.³¹

To date, more than 30 governments have led the implementation of interpretive FOP systems, although relatively few have made them mandatory.³² When proposals arise to do so, they tend to face pushback from industry actors, who often employ legal challenges or seek to substitute with a less stringent and/or voluntary system.³³ Industry opposition to proposals has been evident in Canada,³⁴ Colombia,³⁵ the EU,³⁶ France,³⁷ and Thailand,³⁸ for example.

Developing national food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs)

FBDGs are a set of government-endorsed, evidence-based dietary recommendations that are specific to a national context. Not only are they used to influence consumer behavior to consume healthier diets, but also to inform a range of national food, nutrition, and health policies and programs (many of which affect industry). WHO sees them as key measure to address obesity and other diet-related NCDs.³⁹ According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), over one hundred countries have FBDGs in place worldwide.⁴⁰

Given that their development involves synthesizing extensive (and sometimes inconclusive) studies and data sources, and impacts a range of stakeholders indirectly, the process of developing FBDGs is inherently political.⁴¹ Many countries therefore opt to solicit input from a range of stakeholders, including through industry lobbying.

There is a risk, however, that industry actors may seek to skew the guidelines in favor of their respective product portfolios: the US Dietary Guidelines have been particularly contentious for this reason,⁴² while industry influence has also been observed in relation to Canada's Food Guide⁴³ and Mexico's Guidelines.⁴⁴ As such, some governments take steps to limit industry involvement in the process, such as in the Netherlands⁴⁵ and, more recently, Canada.⁴⁶

Given the extensive body of evidence that the F&B industry seeks to oppose such policies, a growing number of voices are calling for industry actors to be banned from lobbying on public health related measures, in a similar manner to the tobacco industry.⁴⁷ As explained in Box 1, some governments are already enacting such measures in relation to FBDGs, while WHO has also developed stronger safeguards seeking to prevent excessive industry influence over its activities, for example.⁴⁸ As such, there is a possibility that, if the industry continues to lobby against the public health interest and with disproportionate influence, the privileges it has enjoyed for so long could be restricted. In turn, F&B companies would be severely restricted in their ability to provide input in policy discussions, even were their intentions to be entirely in the public interest.

12 Yet it is possible that industry input in the policy-making process can be positive, with benefits for public health. The policies outlined in Box 1 are not one-size-fits-all approaches: within each policy, a considerable number of design choices are required in order maximize its effectiveness, depending on a myriad of contextual factors. Poor policy design not only reduces the impact of the policy, but can also have negative consequences on public health. For policies directly affecting the markets for F&B products in particular, companies possess valuable information and expertise that can be used to inform these, including sales data, insights into consumer behavior, in-depth understanding of how complex markets operate, and knowledge of rapidly changing and innovating fields (such as digital marketing techniques and product innovation). A company that is committed to seeing a successful policy could therefore make a positive contribution (provided they do so transparently, to allow stakeholder scrutiny and enhance accountability).

ATNI's research has found that a growing number of companies have committed to support public health and nutrition in their missions and strategies.⁴⁹ Some industry voices, meanwhile, have expressed informally or at meetings under Chatham house rules, that they are beginning to desire to level the playing-field and see sector-wide progress, for which policy is key. Companies that support progressive public health policy can add considerable political weight behind legislation that might other-

wise struggle to pass. It should be borne in mind that the number of examples of companies doing so, however, is far more limited than the sizeable body of evidence of industry actors evidenced as undermining these policies.

As the world addresses a three-fold crisis in nutrition – rising over-nutrition leading to skyrocketing disease at the same time as stubbornly high under-nutrition rates and the emerging awareness of micronutrient deficiency – all actors must play their part in the solution. The 25 largest F&B companies profiled in this report have immense power to shape public policy responses: However, too often this has been to the detriment of public health.

1.1.3 Responsible lobbying

The definition of 'Responsible Lobbying' adopted in this report is that contained in the Responsible Lobbying Framework (RLF). The RLF was developed to be the 'gold standard' of responsible lobbying, drawing on 14 existing lobbying frameworks, standards, and principles (including those developed by Transparency International, OECD, the UN, and WHO), with input from a group civil society organizations and companies committed to lobbying responsibly.⁵⁰

The Framework is based around integrating five principles - transparency, accountability, consistency, legitimacy, and opportunity - into an organization's approach to lobbying. These principles [see Box 2] are made actionable through 22 'sub-principles', which describe the steps organizations must take to improve their **policy commitments, management systems, and disclosure** with regards to lobbying.

The three areas are interlinked: Policy commitments set direction and expectations; Management Systems are companies' control mechanisms on policy implementation and enforcement. Meanwhile, disclosure further reinforces this by allowing external stakeholders to form a view of a company's policy commitments and the functioning of its management systems, thus enabling them to hold companies to account.

The five principles of the Responsible Lobbying Framework

1. Legitimacy: Responsible lobbying will never be inconsistent with the public interest.

2. Transparency: Responsible lobbying organisations will be open, complete, and truthful in their communications on the topic.

3. Consistency: Responsible lobbying organisations will practice what they preach, remaining consistent with their professional codes, organizational values and other public positions.

4. Accountability: Responsible lobbying organizations and those who lobby for them will be accountable to stakeholders for their actions.

5. Opportunity: Responsible lobbying organizations will coordinate and align activities with others when they identify issues that further the public interest and are of common concern.

1.1.4 Lobbying as an ESG risk for investors

Responsible lobbying is rising fast on the Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) agenda. Investors are increasingly regarding discrepancy between companies' lobbying activities and their publicly stated values and positions as a risk to the value of a company's ESG commitments and, therefore, their investment.⁵¹ The Corporate Lobbying Alignment Project argues that corporate lobbying can undermine the necessary policy actions to addressing systemic risks such as climate change, public health, or economic inequality, and therefore often conflicts with investors' long-term ESG objectives.⁵² Meanwhile lobbying that goes against the public interest or that is carried out in an improper manner has been cited as posing additional legal and reputational risks, as well as risks related to employee engagement and retention, recruitment of top talent, and consumer preferences.⁵³ Investors and other stakeholders are therefore demanding transparency from companies regarding their lobbying activities.⁵⁴

Within this general landscape, lobbying on climate change is under particular scrutiny. For example, in 2018, a group of 74 investors with more than USD4.5 trillion in Assets Under Management (AUM) signed investor expectations on corporate climate lobbying.⁵⁵ In 2022, a Global Standard on Responsible Climate Lobbying was published.⁵⁶

There has also been growing interest regarding their lobbying practices among investors in F&B companies. In 2019, for example, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), a coalition of over 300 global institutional investors representing more than USD4 trillion in managed assets,⁵⁷ wrote letters to the 11 largest publicly traded F&B companies in the US with key asks regarding their lobbying disclosures and management systems. More recently, the ICCR and around 20 other investors (representing nearly USD140 billion in assets) have published an [open letter to food and beverage industry executives to step up their global disclosures](#).⁵⁸

In addition, 'Lobbying' is one of the four pillars of the [Investor Expectations on Nutrition, Diets and Health](#). This is a framework for shareholder analysis and corporate engagement that has been adopted by over 80 institutional investors as part of the ATNI Investor Signatory Group, and currently represents USD 20.3 trillion in assets under management. In December 2021, at the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit, a group of investors (53 investors with USD 12.4 trillion in assets) issued the [N4G Investor Pledge](#). The pledge, committed to directly engage 20 publicly listed F&B manufacturers on the four pillars of the Expectations, including 'Lobbying', and asked all companies to adopt the five principles and associated management practices set out in the Responsible Lobbying Framework.

In April and May 2022, shareholders in Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, representing 13% and 18% of their shares respectively, presented landmark resolutions at the companies' annual general meetings. The resolutions to compel the companies to disclose comprehensive information about their global political activities and spending, following reports that they had been obstructing key public health policies in Mexico and Brazil (respectively).⁵⁹

1.1.5 This report

This report summarises the Access to Nutrition Initiative (ATNI)'s first in-depth benchmark of the world's 25 largest F&B companies' lobbying Policy commitments, Management systems, and Disclosures against the Responsible Lobbying Framework (RLF), with a focus on nutrition.

The following pages contain an explanation of the methodology and research process followed; detailed analysis of the results by category, including deep-dives on selected indicators and highlighted best practices; before offering recommendations for further improvement in the final section.

We hope that this report proves useful to the assessed companies and other interested stakeholders so they can better understand the current picture of the industry's performance on responsible lobbying, and the areas in which further improvement is needed.

ATNI's prior work on lobbying by the F&B industry

Since 2013, ATNI has assessed F&B companies' high level lobbying commitments and basic disclosure as part of its Global Indexes and country-level Spotlight Indexes. Category G on 'Engagement', has included a small number of indicators, initially only covering lobbying commitments, with new indicators being added to recent iterations covering management systems, anti-bribery and corruption (ABC) policies, disclosure of political donations, trade associations, and lobbying positions. You can read ATNI's most recent Category G reports for the [Global Index 2021](#) and [US Index 2022](#).

In 2020, ATNI published the [Spotlight on Lobbying: BMS Manufacturers 2021](#), which benchmarked the world's nine largest manufacturers of Breast-milk Substitutes (BMS) against the Responsible Lobbying Framework, with a focus on lobbying on policies aligning with the WHO's International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (WHO Code).

2. Methodology



2.1 Company selection

The companies included are the same as those in the [ATNI Global Index 2021](#): 25 of the largest F&B manufacturers globally (according to 2018 sales data drawn from Euromonitor). Together, these companies accounted for 24% of the global market share of processed foods and drinks sales in 2018, with combined sales of over USD720 billion.⁶⁰

It should be noted that seven companies in this selection, as manufacturers of BMS, were previously assessed in the [Spotlight on Lobbying: BMS Manufacturers 2021](#): Danone, Nestlé, FrieslandCampina, Kraft Heinz, Mengniu, and Yili.

TABLE 1: COMPANY SELECTION

Company	Headquarters	Ownership type
Ajinomoto Group	Japan	Public
Aria Foods a/s	Denmark	Cooperative
BRF S.A.	Brazil	Public
Campbell Soup Company	USA	Public
China Mengniu Dairy Co.	China	Public
Conagra Brands	USA	Public
Danone	France	Public
Ferrero Group	Italy	Private
General Mills, Inc.	USA	Public
Groupe Lactalis S.A.	France	Private
Grupo Bimbo, S.A.B de C.V.	Mexico	Public
Inner Mongolia Yili Industrial Group*	China	Public
Kellogg Company	USA	Public
Keurig Dr Pepper	USA	Public
Royal Friesland Campina	Netherlands	Cooperative
Mars, Inc	USA	Private
Meiji Holdings Co., Ltd.	Japan	Public
Mondelez International, Inc.	USA	Public
Nestlé S.A.	Switzerland	Public
PepsiCo, Inc	USA	Public
Suntory Beverage & Food Ltd.	Japan	Public
The Coca-Cola Company	USA	Public
The Kraft Heinz Company	USA	Public
Tingyi Cayman Islands Holding	China	Public
Unilever	UK/Netherlands	Public

* Previously assessed in [Spotlight on Lobbying: BMS Manufacturers 2021](#).

2.2 Assessment framework and indicator adaptations

The 25 companies were assessed against the RLF using a methodology developed by ATNI and Carnstone (a London-based management consultancy specializing in sustainability), which was adapted from that used in the [Spotlight on Lobbying: BMS Manufacturers 2021](#).

To develop the 2021 BMS Lobbying assessment, the 22 sub-principles of the RLF were transposed into 35 indicators in a similar style to other [ATNI Index methodologies](#), evaluating companies' policy commitments, management systems, and disclosure, both for overall lobbying and specifically in relation to lobbying on WHO Code-aligned regulations.

While the basic principles remain the same, the scope of the current assessment is considerably broader than the BMS company assessment, both in terms of the range of companies assessed and relevant policy topics. As such, BMS-specific indicators were adapted to ensure applicability to the wider F&B sector, such as those relating to specific public health policies and international public health frameworks of the types outlined in the previous section.

Lessons from the 2021 BMS Spotlight were also integrated into the new methodology: For example, where indicators were widely used – such as those assessing anti-bribery and corruption policies and whistleblowing mechanisms – we added the best practices identified in the 2021 BMS Spotlight as answer options, enabling us to better differentiate between 'frontrunners' on these topics and those doing less. Meanwhile some unnecessary indicators were deleted, and others rephrased and regrouped to form a more coherent flow and reflect learnings both from the previous assessment and developments around company lobbying over the past year.

Importantly, 'geographic' and 'completeness' criteria were added to encourage more complete reporting by companies, relating to the comprehensiveness of their reporting and the geographic coverage of their disclosures. These act as 'multipliers' (on a scale of 0.25-1): the full score for an indicator is only applied if the highest multiplier criteria are satisfied. For a responsible lobbying practice to be fully recognized in our evaluation it must therefore meet our full completeness criteria and be applied in all relevant countries or regions.

Together, these changes mean that the new methodology is more demanding than that for the 2021 BMS Lobbying assessment: companies need to do more in order to achieve higher scores. Direct comparisons between the scores of the two Spotlight on Lobbying benchmarks should not be made.

[The current methodology](#) contains 35 indicators. The benchmark is divided into three sections: **Commitments** (8 indicators, 23%), **Management systems** (8 indicators, 23%) and **Disclosure** (19 indicators, 54%) around lobbying activities.

2.3 Research process

In close consultation with ATNI, analysts from Carnstone conducted initial desk-based research of publicly available information, primarily from the companies' websites and reports. Carnstone previously developed the RLF and undertook the research for the previous BMS assessment. ATNI had ultimate control and review over the assessment methodology, research process, and results.



2.4 Scope and limitations

It is important to note the following:

- 1. Scope:** Included in the scope was direct and indirect lobbying via (for example) trade associations, as well as political donations. There are a range of other more indirect lobbying practices relevant in the F&B sector which were not considered explicitly, such as shaping the evidence base on diet- and public health-related issues, establishing relationships with key opinion leaders, media, and community groups, or opposition destabilization strategies. A wider review of informational and constituency-building strategies is beyond the scope of this report.
- 2. Unverified:** The process relied on companies' statements in their published documents and on company websites. Such statements were not independently verified by ATNI, so may or may not reflect companies' actual lobbying processes and activities in specific markets. Essentially, disclosures and systems described have been taken at face value, on the assumption that companies' reporting is accurate.
- 3. Public:** The evaluation is only based on publicly available information. During company engagement, some pointed us to internal policies and management systems that are not publicly available and - such evidence could not be accepted for the sake of fairness. Moreover, ensuring such information is publicly available aligns with the Transparency & Accountability principles of the RLF, which expects companies to make information accessible to the general public.

- 4. Missing engagement:** 12 companies did not engage with us about the assessment results. It is therefore possible that we have missed information and that these companies could have potentially received higher scores.
- 5. Emerging concept:** Despite growing awareness – especially regarding climate lobbying – 'responsible lobbying' remains an emerging topic, the concept of which will evolve over time. While the RLF strived to be comprehensive and considered 27 sources and eventually used fourteen in drafting the framework, others may have a different view of what constitutes 'responsible lobbying'.
- 6. Geographic and portfolio variation:** The wide variation in product portfolios, home markets/ geographical foci, and governance structures, means that different indicators could have varying levels of applicability to different companies. To mitigate this, all indicators included a 'Not applicable' option which – if we agreed it to be genuinely not applicable – removed the question from the overall evaluation for that company.
- 7. Bias from Transparency Registers:** Companies more active in countries/regions with high mandatory disclosure requirements and lobbying transparency registers, such as the US, Canada, France, and the EU, were more likely to disclose certain information than peers active in other regions.
- 8. Unweighted:** Each indicator was given the same weighting, and no weightings were applied at the section-level. This assumes that each individual indicator has equivalent value and/or difficulty for companies to achieve.

3. Evaluation results



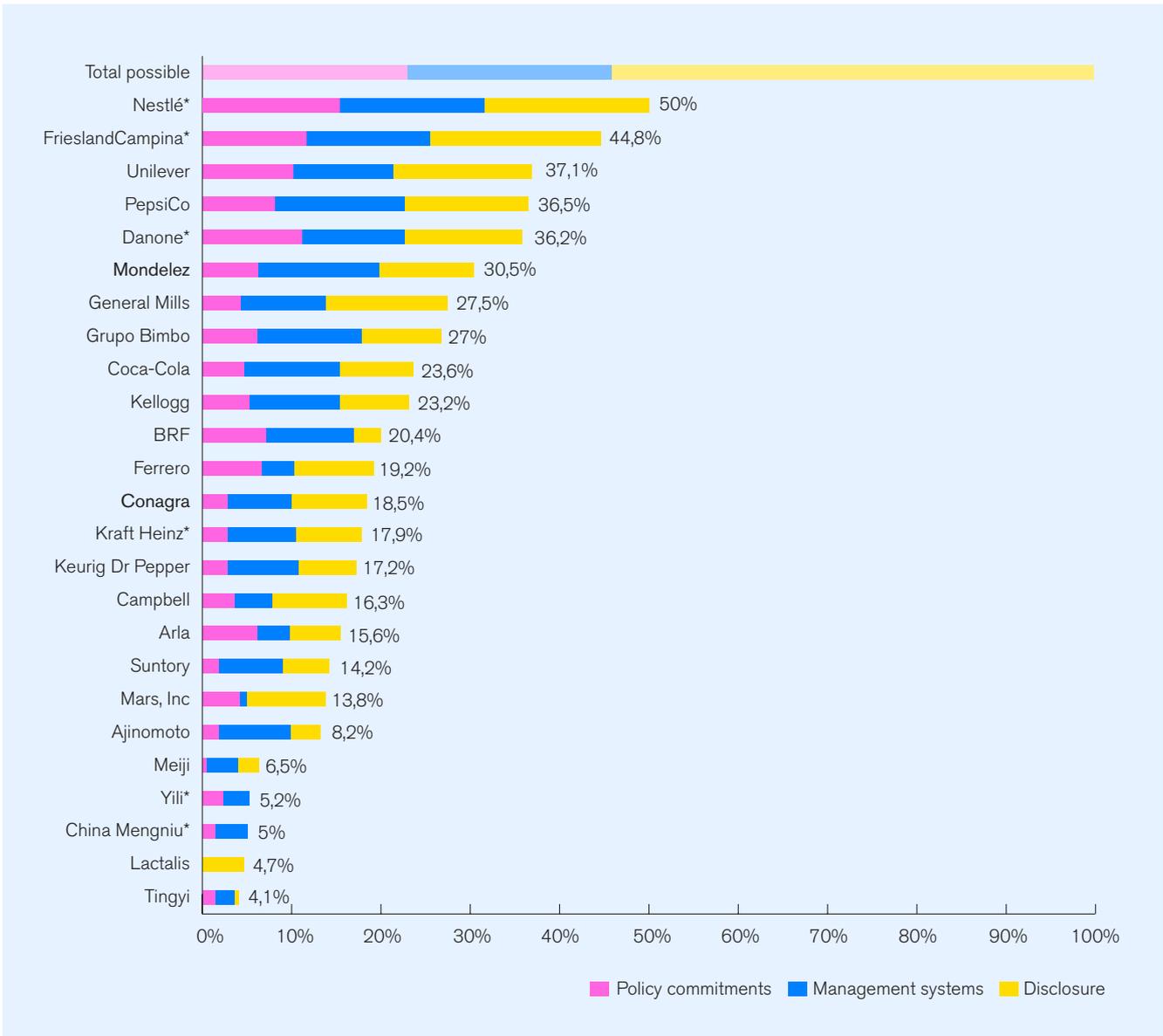
3.1 Results overview

When assessed against the RLF (with a focus on nutrition-related lobbying), company scores ranged from 3% to 50%, with an average of 21% across all 25 companies.¹ This indicates that current practice is well below the standard set in the Responsible Lobbying Framework. However, this might be expected, given the aspirational nature of the framework. Since this is a relatively new standard and ‘responsible lobbying’ is an emerging concept,

even for established multinational companies, the framework was deliberately intended to provide a best practice benchmark that is stretching and would take multiple years to achieve. As the analysis in the following sections show, best practices were identified among the companies for almost every indicator, demonstrating that the asks of the RLF are attainable, especially if companies learn from each other’s practices.

1 Company total score (for all sections - Policy commitments, Management systems, Disclosure) / Total possible score.

Figure 1: Company scores



The companies can be separated into three groups for discussion, based on their scores:

TABLE 2: GROUP 1 COMPANIES

Company name	Commitments	Management Systems	Disclosure	Overall Score
Nestlé*	68%	70%	34%	50%
FrieslandCampina*	51%	60%	35%	44.8%
Unilever	45%	48%	29%	37.1%
PepsiCo	35%	64%	26%	36.5%
Danone*	49%	50%	24%	36.2%

Group 1: Five companies scored between 35% and 50%. Notably, these companies scored highest on commitments by some margin, while also performing relatively strongly on management systems and disclosure (where they were among the top six performing companies). This indicates a more consistent and mature approach to responsible lobbying overall, relative to the other companies assessed.

These companies are more likely to demonstrate best practices on different aspects of the RLF and have particular areas of strength within each section.

That said, given that the highest score was 50%, they also displayed clear shortcomings on certain aspects of each section. Thus, all of these companies still have significant scope for improvement to comply with the RLF, especially on disclosure.

It is also worth pointing out that three of the companies in this group – Nestlé, Friesland-Campina, and Danone – were assessed in the 2021 BMS Spotlight on Lobbying, and therefore have had previous exposure to the RLF and opportunities to improve their practices since.



TABLE 3: GROUP 2 COMPANIES

Company name	Commitments	Management Systems	Disclosure	Overall Score
Mondelez	27%	59%	20%	30.5%
General Mills	19%	42%	25%	27.5%
Grupo Bimbo	27%	51%	17%	27%
Coca-Cola	21%	46%	15%	23.6%
Kellogg	23%	45%	14%	23.2%
BRF	31%	43%	6%	20.4%
Ferrero	29%	16%	16%	19.2%
Conagra	13%	31%	16%	18.5%
Kraft Heinz*	13%	33%	14%	17.9%
Keurig Dr Pepper	13%	34%	12%	17.2%
Campbell	16%	19%	15%	16.3%
Arla	27%	16%	10%	15.6%
Suntory	8%	31%	10%	14.2%
Mars, Inc	19%	3%	16%	13.8%

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Fourteen companies make up **Group 2**, scoring between 10% and 35%. Companies in this group generally publish some information about their lobbying beyond minimum requirements or expectations. They also typically perform positively against some parts of the RLF or on specific indicators, but are less consistent across the

board. For example, Mondelez demonstrated relatively stronger management systems (3rd, 59%); General Mills had more comprehensive and relevant disclosures compared to others (5th, 27%), but was relatively weaker on other topics. Companies in this group are also more likely to disclose.

TABLE 4: GROUP 3

Company name	Commitments	Management Systems	Disclosure	Overall Score
Ajinomoto	8%	13%	6%	8.2%
Meiji	0%	16%	4%	6.5%
Yili*	10%	13%	0%	5.2%
China Mengniu*	0%	0%	9%	5%
Lactalis	6%	16%	0%	4.7%
Tingyi Corp	6%	9%	1%	4.1%

Lobbying in China

The three companies headquartered in China (Mengniu, Yili, and Tingyi) do not disclose much in the public domain in relation to lobbying. In China, lobbying is formally and primarily carried out through company representatives elected to contribute as Deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC)¹ and members of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).² Informally but frequently, companies may exert influence on policymaking by advising government entities on economic affairs, sitting on consultation boards, participating in government projects/ pilot programs, or through public relations departments. Although the processes are not unlike those practiced in developed markets, they are less distilled into a singular concept and not widely regarded as a subject of public debate and regulation in China.

We learned from desk-based research that the three companies engage in activity of this kind.^{64, 65} Following the recent government-initiated anti-corruption movement addressing government officials' conduct in various capacities, regulation and enforcement measures will continue to evolve, and this could have far-reaching implications for companies engaging in policy development in China.⁶⁶

- 1 人大代表 as in Chinese.
- 2 政协委 as in Chinese.

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Group 3 consists of six companies, all of whom scored below 10%. Generally, these companies publish very little information about their lobbying aside from anti-bribery corruption and whistle-blowing mechanisms, which is now a common expectation and practice among large companies worldwide.

Of note, the eight lowest scoring companies are all either family-owned, privately-held companies, or headquartered in China or Japan. Family-owned, privately-listed companies, such as Mars, Lactalis, and Ferrero, are not exposed to the same level of investor scrutiny as publicly listed companies, particularly on corporate governance. Therefore, they are less likely to disclose information about their lobbying management systems, and disclose lobbying-related information more generally. That said, Ferrero also falls into this category, yet ranks 12th overall, although only by 5.4%.

In the case of China, the way companies relate to the political system has to be considered (although lobbying does still occur: see **Box 3**). Lobbying is less of a defined practice in Japan, although there are many opportunities for companies to engage policymakers with and influence policy.⁶² certain Japanese industries, for example, have been highly active lobbying against the government's decarbonization policies.⁶³

The following pages discuss the results of the three sections of the methodology (Policy commitments, Management systems, and Disclosure), providing a section overview before presenting a deep-dive on selected indicators.

Best practices are emphasized in bold, with a corresponding symbol in the margin. The symbol is larger for practices that are exemplar (i.e., closest to satisfying the full requirements of an indicator or specific answer option but is unique to one or two companies); while smaller symbols are used to highlight practices where it is the only relevant practice to highlight among all the companies, but still has significant room for improvement.



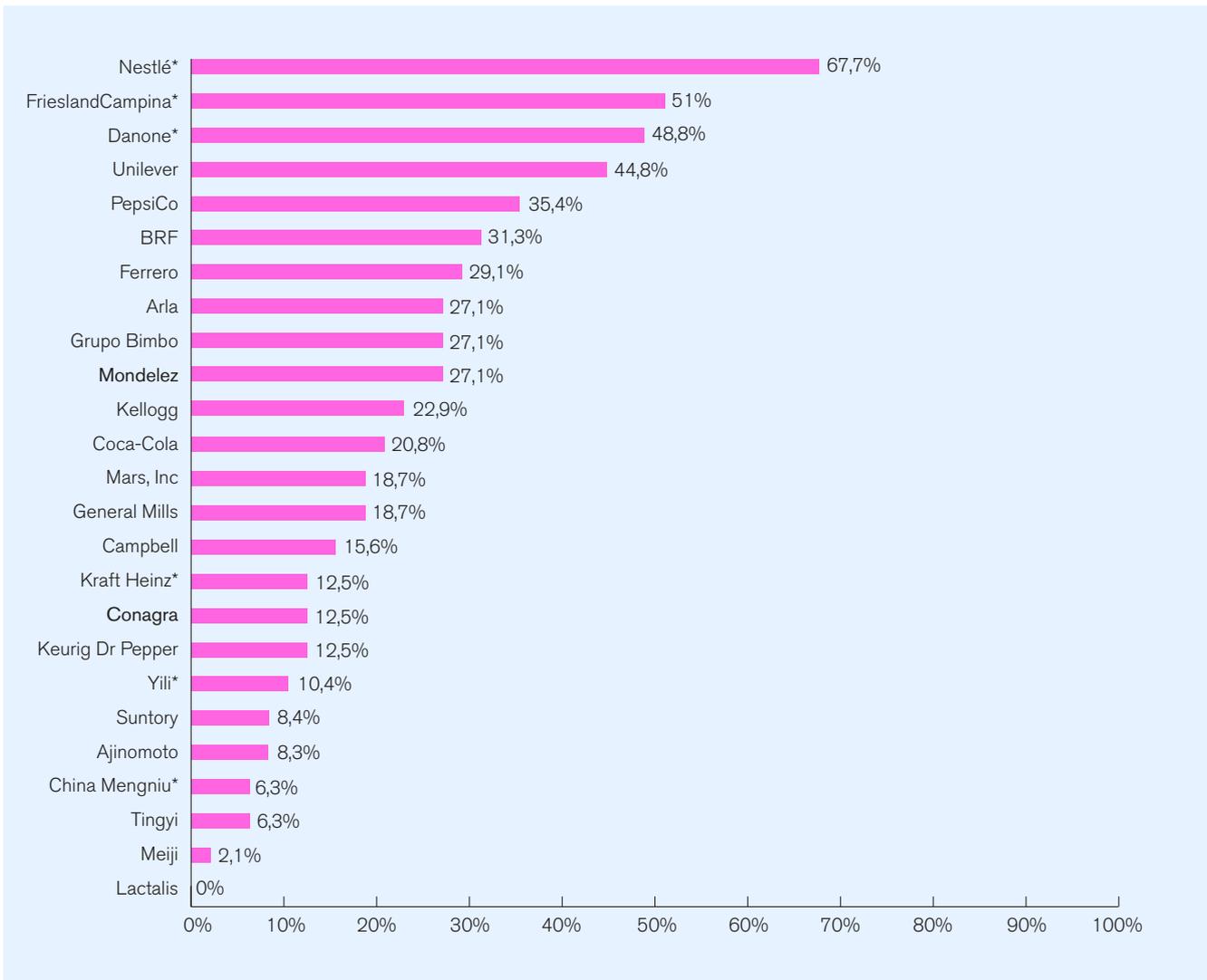
3.2 Policy commitments

This section evaluates the public commitments made by companies to guide their lobbying practices – including lobbying in support of public health interests, respect for relevant lobbying standards and codes, policies on making and disclosing political donations, and public codes of conduct covering bribery and corruption. Setting public commitments is an essential first step in determining the company’s agenda and expectations, but also acts as a powerful mechanism for ensuring consistency and external accountability as companies can be held to their pronouncements. Such commitments must therefore be 1) **explicit** (not just inferred to through practice or other statements), 2) **lobbying-specific**, and 3) **in policies proprietary**

to the company (instead of referencing statements made by third-party organisations such as trade associations or industry groups).

The results for Policy Commitments (eight indicators) are shown in **Figure 2**. Nestlé scored highest for this section (67.7%) with FrieslandCampina, Danone, PepsiCo and Unilever also scoring highly (over 40%). What sets these companies apart is that they each publish a broad commitment to only lobby in support policies that promote the consumption of healthy diets, and, in the case of Nestlé and Unilever, specific public health measures. With the exception of Unilever, they also all commit to put in place controls around trade associations and industry policy groups, to ensure that the lobbying of those organisations is

Figure 2: Company scores: Policy commitments



consistent with their own lobbying. This suggests that they are further than most other evaluated companies in linking their lobbying to public interest considerations, and in taking a more holistic view of their lobbying, rather than only focusing on in-house activities.

3.2.1 Commitment to lobby only in support of the public health interest

As per Principle 1 of the RLF, “Responsible lobbying will never be inconsistent with the public interest”, a company that commits to lobbying responsibly would explicitly commit to only lobby in support of policy measures that promote public health (or, at minimum, not to lobby against them). Seven companies (Campbell, Danone, FrieslandCampina, Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Unilever) were found to make statements indicating a commitment to only lobby in support policies that promote the consumption of healthy diets.

However, only three of these companies (Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Unilever) were found to make commitments in relation to specific (WHO-endorsed) public health policies.



For example, Unilever publishes a range of ‘Advocacy and policy asks’⁶⁷ stating its position in support of healthy diets, front of pack nutrition labelling, and reformulation targets in alignment with WHO guidelines for saturated fats, salt and sugar.

Meanwhile Nestlé states that it advocates for policies to promote “responsible marketing to children” and “transparent nutrition information to consumers (on-pack labelling and digital)”. PepsiCo states, in relation to its political engagement, its “support clear front-of-pack labelling to help consumers make informed choices about what they’re eating.”

Another way companies can signal commitment to the ‘public health interest’ in their lobbying is to commit to align their lobbying objectives with government efforts to implement international public health policy frameworks. For example,

WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013-2030; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 and 3; or nutrition-specific commitments made at the Nutrition4Growth (N4G) Summit and/or UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) in 2021. However, no company was found to explicitly do this at this time.

3.2.2 Respect for relevant lobbying standards and codes

It is important that companies commit to align their lobbying activities with external lobbying standards and codes of conduct (RLF Principles 1.3 (Legitimacy) and 4.2 (Accountability)). On one hand, nearly half of the companies assessed are members of an industry initiative that involves some form of lobbying code of conduct, such as the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement⁶⁸ or the International Food and Beverage Alliance (IFBA).⁶⁹ The former includes principles aligned with the RLF such as transparency, accountability, and integrity, amongst others; the latter include principles such as a shared purpose; integrity, respect and trust; and accountability and transparency.



Only two companies support non-industry initiatives: FrieslandCampina states that its “Policy on Responsible Advocacy”⁷⁰ is inspired by the Responsible Lobbying Framework, the OECD Principles for Transparency and Integrity in Lobbying, and the Transparency International Standards for Lobbying Regulation.” Nestlé also publicly cites these frameworks, stating that they are used in their lobbying approach.

3.2.3 Political donations

It is considered best practice for companies not to make any political donations, in any markets (RLF 1.4).



Eight companies (Arla, BRF, Danone, Ferrero, FrieslandCampina, Grupo Bimbo, Mars, and Unilever), commit to make no political donations in any markets.

Nestlé commits to only make political donations in their home market (Switzerland), and any donations have to be approved by the CEO and the Chairman and publicly disclosed. PepsiCo states that they generally only make political donations in their home market (the United States), with all donations being disclosed, and any donations outside of the US requiring a written recommendation and approval from various local and global senior leaders.

A majority of companies do not make any commitment around political donations. There is a clear geographical difference: most European companies commit not to make political donations; while most North and South American and Asian companies make no such commitment.

3.2.4 Crowding Out

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Another common criticism of corporate lobbying is that companies have much deeper pockets than other interest groups, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and can therefore outspend them and gain greater, more frequent access to decision-makers. For example, corporate lobbying in the US on Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) labelling requirements in the mid-2010s was found to have dwarfed that of labelling advocates by a ratio of 20-to-1.⁷¹ Meanwhile in Canada, while federal restrictions on food marketing to children were being proposed in 2016 (Bill S-228), industry representatives were found to have had registered 80-85% of interactions with government institutions and policymakers on the topic.⁷² That is why the RLF states in Principle 5 (Opportunity) that responsible lobbying organizations will “respect and safeguard the opportunity for other interest groups to lobby, for example [by] not spending disproportionate resources on lobbying to crowd out other interests”.



Nestlé is the only company which explicitly states that it will respect and safeguard the opportunity for other interest groups to lobby, and make a commitment to take steps towards spending proportionate resources on lobbying.

It states: “We are conscious that our advocacy and lobbying activities are legitimate but remain a

privilege. It is however in our interest to achieve collective positive outcomes and to share it. That is why we respect and safeguard the opportunity for other interest groups to lobby and do so by not spending disproportionately in lobbying. We also seek to pursue cooperation with stakeholders to promote and support governmental efforts to improve transparency and accountability in relation to lobbying.”



FrieslandCampina is the only other company with a statement pertaining to safeguarding the opportunities for other interest groups to lobby, although without no mention of expenditure. They said: “In the view of FrieslandCampina it is of importance that the positions of all stakeholders are considered in the public decision-making process. Therefore, FrieslandCampina respects and safeguards the opportunity for other interest groups to lobby.”

3.2.5 Working with others in pursuit of the public interest

As per Principle 4, ‘Accountability’, of the RLF, involving stakeholders in setting lobbying positions, agreeing lobbying strategy, and in reviewing performance not only enhances companies’ accountability to such stakeholders, but their insights can also ensure that their lobbying activities are sufficiently aligned with the public health interest, increasing their legitimacy (Principle 1). This is especially the case when public health stakeholders have established expertise and/or are widely acknowledged as representing those particularly affected by the companies’ products and practices (such as consumers and vulnerable groups). Forming common positions on policies that benefit public health *before* presenting these to policymakers is not only a more efficient process, but is more likely to succeed in passing such policies successfully.

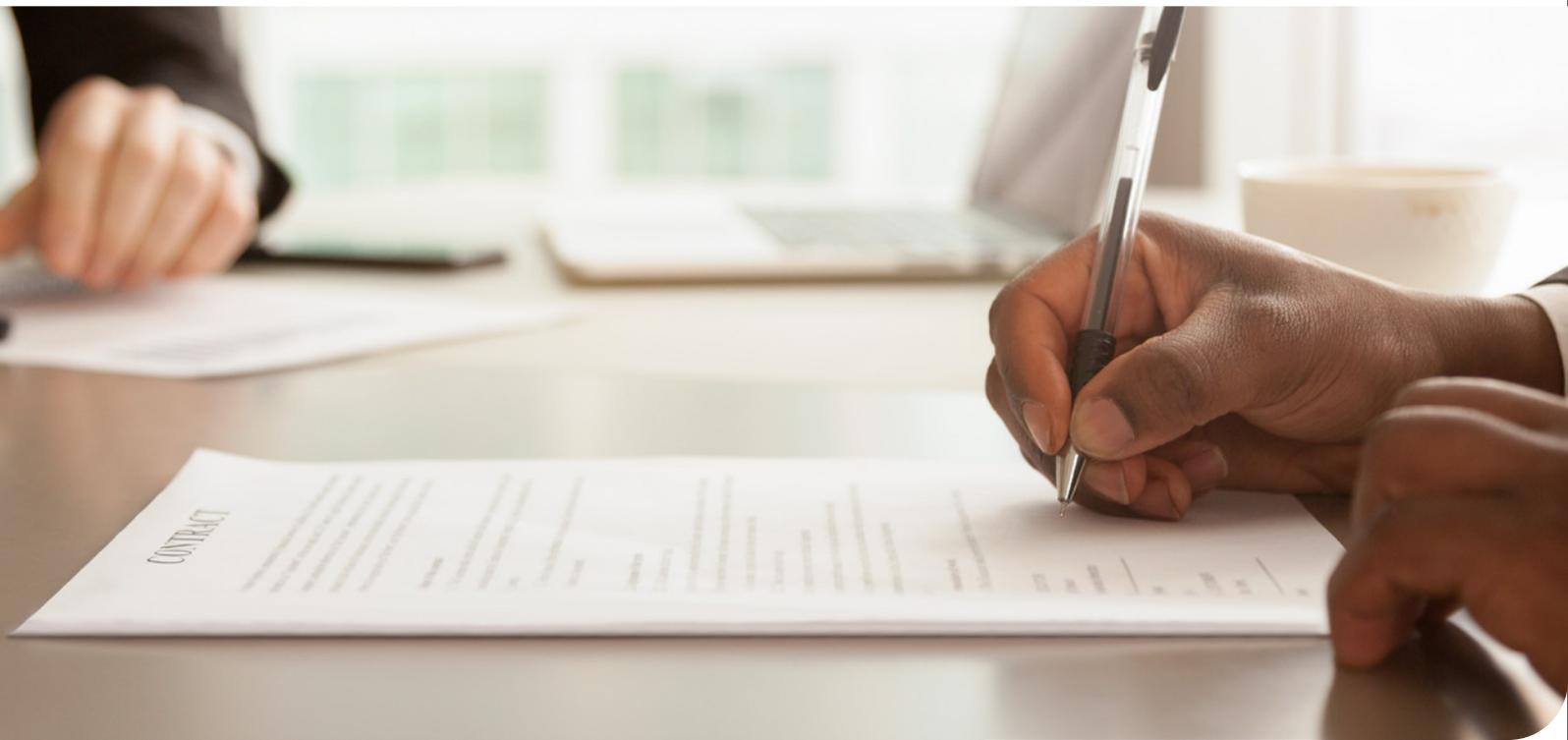
While this is increasingly common practice among companies in relation to other aspects of their business activities (including on nutrition)⁷³, only one company was found to make such a commitment explicitly in relation to lobbying:

★ **Danone. In its Policy of Advocacy, the company states “It is indeed the company’s conviction that policy-shaping no longer belongs solely to politics but includes a panoply of actors. Our dialogue with this multitude and variety of stakeholders helps us to build comprehensive positions and solutions. On top of regular conversations with these stakeholders, we conduct a periodical materiality assessment that helps us to refine our understanding of their needs and interests, and thus better define the key challenges and address them strategically.”⁷⁴**

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However, while the commitment is clearly made, no specific examples of such engagement were found.

Four additional companies – Nestlé, Friesland-Campina, Ferrero, and General Mills – commit to pursue opportunities to take part in multi-stakeholder partnerships to engage in policy where a common position that supports key public health interest outcomes can be found (RLF, 5.2). Such an approach is in many ways ideal, since the shared position between multiple different stakeholders enhances trust, credibility, and legitimacy of their collective advocacy efforts.⁷⁵ However, care must be taken to ensure there is a balance of power in such coalitions, or else there is a risk that more powerful interests dominate, with public interest groups (such civil society organizations) being used to enhance their credibility and legitimacy, rather than truly serving the public interest.⁷⁶ Full transparency about such partnerships, especially in terms of funding and governance, is therefore essential.



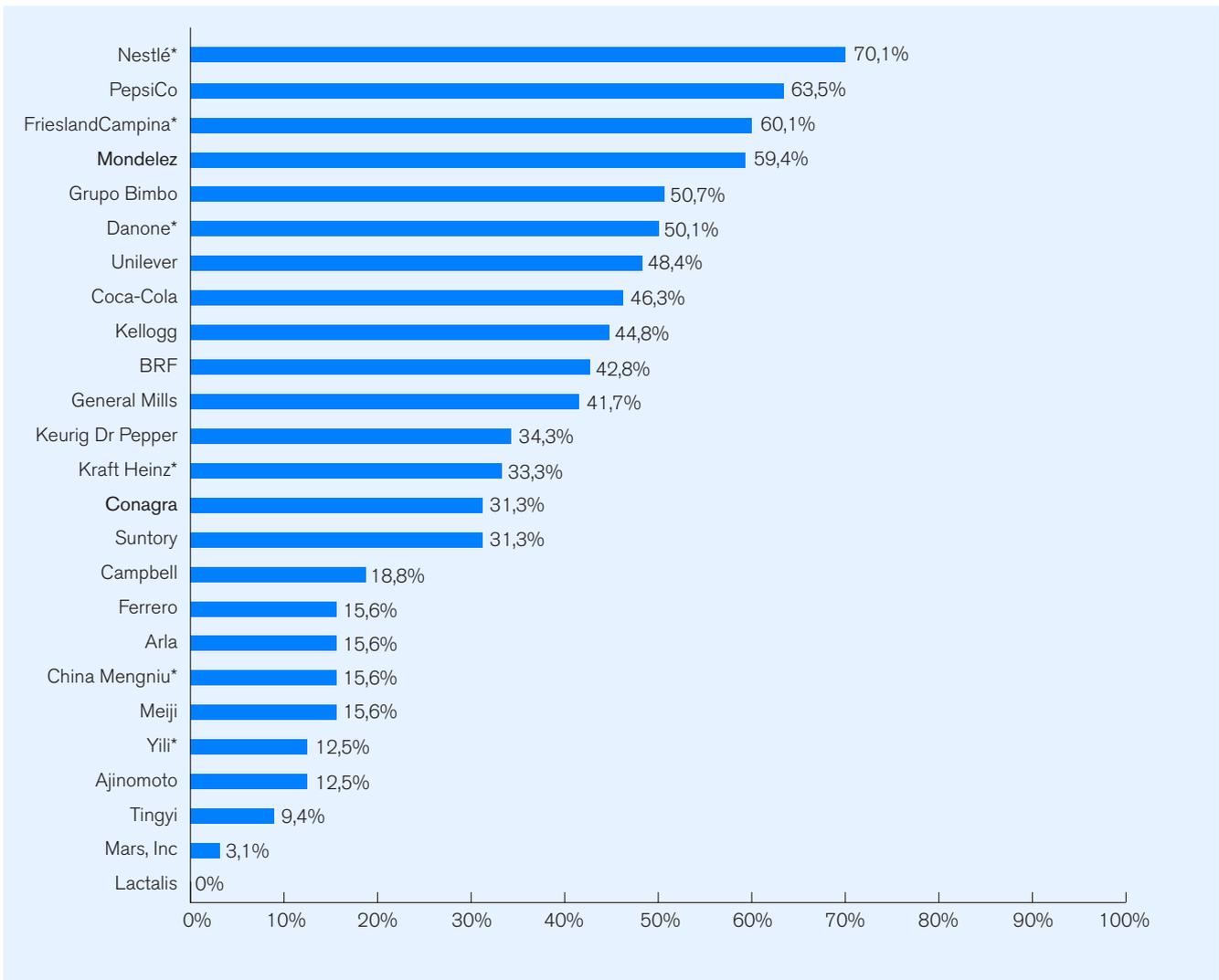
3.3 Management systems

“poor governance of corporate political activity, coupled with misalignment to a company’s stated strategy or a lack of transparency about the activity, can manifest in financial, legal, and reputational risks that can affect long-term value.”

- Vanguard (\$7 trillion in global assets under management)⁷⁷

Figure 3: Company scores: Management systems

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This section evaluates the lobbying-related management systems that companies have in place to ensure their policy commitments are implemented and complied with in practice, while generating clear internal accountability. As per Principle 4 (Accountability) of the Responsible Lobbying Framework, companies should have systems in place to bribery and corruption, political donations, and lobbying conducted through third parties, and these should ideally be supported by an independent auditing process.

Companies generally received higher scores in this area, possibly because it is an established expectation that large companies will have mature management systems in place to tackle bribery, corruption, and conflicts of interest. Notably, many companies have a comprehensive code of conduct covering interactions with government officials, and have clearly communicated their expectation for third parties acting on companies' behalf to follow the same protocols.

Figure 3 shows the results for Management systems (8 indicators). Nestlé received the highest score for this section (70%), with FrieslandCampina and Mondelez following at around 60%. PepsiCo and Danone are the only other two companies to achieve a score of over 50%.

The top performing companies in this section were more likely to assign Board oversight over their lobbying policies and positions and have controls over trade association memberships and are the only ones which have controls over lobbyists in place to ensure all lobbyists understand and adhere to the company's policies.

Companies with scores between 30 and 50% generally demonstrate controls to ensure compliance with anti-bribery and corruption (ABC) policies and manage relationships with third parties. Evidence to show effective implementation and strength of control is the common gap. For example, a company may state that the Board has oversight of the company's trade association memberships but does not specify how trade associations' lobbying activities are reviewed and the actions taken in case of misalignment.

This is the only section where very few companies (three) score below 10%. This is because almost all companies have publicly available information on the systems, they have in place to ensure compliance with ABC policies (with the exception of Groupe Lactalis and Mars), and the presence of whistle-blowing mechanisms (with the exception of Groupe Lactalis).

3.3.1 Accountability and responsibility for policy implementation

Various governance mechanisms are important in ensuring accountability around the implementation of a company's lobbying policy. These include Board oversight of the lobbying policy, positions, processes and practices (including the lobbying activities of third-party organisations such as trade associations); delegation of responsibility for implementation to an Executive or function; and clarity on control mechanisms, such as regular reporting to the Board and internal audits. Conagra, FrieslandCampina, KDP, and PepsiCo have all of these mechanisms in place.



For example, Conagra's Executive Vice President and General Counsel routinely reviews the company's government affairs activities. Meanwhile, the Nominating and Corporate Governance Committee of the Board of Directors is provided with periodic (at least annual) updates on Conagra's political spending, activities, and participation in trade associations, and "oversees political contributions and lobbying expenditures, to ensure they focus on adding shareholder value and enhancing our position as a good corporate citizen."⁷⁸

Around half of the companies provide information on some- but not all- of the above-mentioned mechanisms. The most common gap is the inclusion of the lobbying activities of trade associations in the Board's oversight remit.

3.3.2 Conflicts of interest and the revolving door

The revolving door, where those who work in government move into business and vice versa, can bestow unfair advantage on the company relative to other interests, given the greater level of access to government personnel and influence such individuals have. The RLF's Principle 1.7 states that organisations should put in place policies and processes to manage this, covering the hiring of former public officials and politicians, and placements or secondments of staff into the public sectors.

Only 6 companies (Danone, Grupo Bimbo, Friesland-Campina, Nestle, Coca-Cola, and Unilever) state that they have an approach to managing the issue, with only three companies (Grupo Bimbo, Friesland-Campina, and Danone) indicating that they have controls in place, such as evaluation processes, cooling off periods, or adapting job specifications and employment contracts to include specific restrictions.



Grupo Bimbo demonstrates the most mature and detailed approach, stipulating in its Global Integrity Policy that “recruitment of public officers” requires a cooling-off period of one year, background checks, clear approval procedures, and whistleblowing procedures; employees undergo annual training on the Policy, and regular audits are undertaken of compliance with the Policy.⁷⁹

3.3.3 Managing relationships with trade associations

How companies manage the lobbying carried out on their (collective) behalf by trade associations and other industry policy groups is an area of focus for the RLF, through Principle 3 (Consistency), especially since much of companies' lobbying is conducted through such organizations.⁸⁰ A common criticism of companies is that, while they publicly express support for certain policies, the trade associations they belong to lobby against exactly such policies.⁸¹ It is therefore essential that companies have processes in place to identify the positions of third-party lobbying organisations, review and manage those relationships, and address any misalignment in lobbying positions.



Nestlé is the only company found to regularly review its involvement in industry and trade organizations and outline the measures it will take (including potential resignation) if it does not agree with the organization's positions.

Coca-Cola and General Mills publicly disclose that they review their involvement with trade associations, and Kellogg and Mondelez provide information on how they approach instances of misalignment between their positions and those of the trade association. The majority of companies assessed, however, do not provide any information about control mechanisms over trade associations or other organisations.

Focus on trade associations' climate lobbying

Misalignment between company positions and their trade associations' has been a particular concern in the area of climate change lobbying, for example, and led to investors coming together to sign the Investor Expectations on Corporate Climate Lobbying. It is now common practice in the Oil & Gas industry to conduct and publish reviews of trade associations' climate lobbying annually, with all major European companies including BP, Shell, Statoil and Total doing so over the past years.

Recently, the UN Race to Zero – the UN-backed global campaign rallying non-state actors to take rigorous and immediate action to halve global emissions by 2030 and deliver a healthier, fairer zero carbon world in time – updated its criteria to require members to align their lobbying and advocacy activities with net zero, which includes regularly reviewing trade association affiliations to ensure alignment.

3.3.4 Controls over lobbyists to ensure that they understand and adhere to the company's policies

Controls are needed to ensure that all lobbyists (in-house and intermediary) understand and adhere to organizational policies. This is important to ensure consistency between the company's publicly stated policies and positions and its actual lobbying practices, as codified under Principle 3 (Consistency) of the RLF. Companies were scored based on whether they have processes to inform and train in-house staff involved in lobbying about their policies, standards, and systems; to provide similar training to and third-party lobbyists; and to investigate and sanction any breaches.

Nine companies publish information about processes to inform and train in-house staff involved in lobbying about its policies, standards and systems; four of these (Mondelez, FrieslandCampina, Nestlé, and Danone) extend these to third-parties; and four companies (Mondelez, BRF, Grupo Bimbo, and Unilever) discuss processes to investigate and sanction any breaches of the company's lobbying policies by both staff and third parties



Mondelez, according to its 'Interacting with Government Officials' Policy, is the only company found to clearly have all of these in place.⁸²

3.3.5 Whistleblowing mechanisms

Whistleblowing mechanisms are important tools which enable employees and third parties to hold companies to account for any potential breaches of their policies or applicable rules. Almost all companies have a whistleblowing mechanism in place. At a minimum, this should provide all employees the chance to anonymously raise any concerns about, or breaches of, the organisation's lobbying policies and codes of conduct, as well as illegal or unethical lobbying activity.

Additional points were granted if the mechanism is easily accessible and prominently displayed on the company's website; if there is a clear process for following up on complaints and tracking the

progress and outcomes of cases; and if the mechanism is communicated to employees as part of onboarding and/or regular training sessions. Six companies (Danone, FrieslandCampina, Nestlé, PepsiCo, General Mills, and Suntory) were found to have each of these elements in place, although no information was found for Groupe Lactalis.

3.3.6 Auditing

Audits are an important management tool that underpins a responsible lobbying company's policies, practices, and reporting, both to ensure that they are functioning as effectively as possible, while also reassuring stakeholders and build trust in the company's internal systems and reporting. The RLF therefore stipulates that companies conduct periodic audits of all lobbying activities carried out by the organization, to ensure alignment; the controls over trade associations and intermediary lobbyists, to ensure their effectiveness; and all public disclosures, to ensure accuracy and completeness. Ideally, such audits should be verified independently by third-party auditors.

Only three companies - General Mills, Kraft Heinz, and Grupo Bimbo – indicate that they conduct some form of internal audit for lobbying.



Kraft Heinz states in its 2021 ESG Report that it "has put in place effective compliance procedures for, and oversight of, lobbying activities, corporate contributions and The Kraft Heinz Political Action Committee (Kraft Heinz PAC) expenditures."⁸³



General Mills, meanwhile, adds a "Compliance Statement" at the end of its Civic Involvement report, confirming that it "was in compliance with the General Mills Civic Policy for the time period covered by the report."⁸⁴

However, both examples provide limited detail about what the process involves.

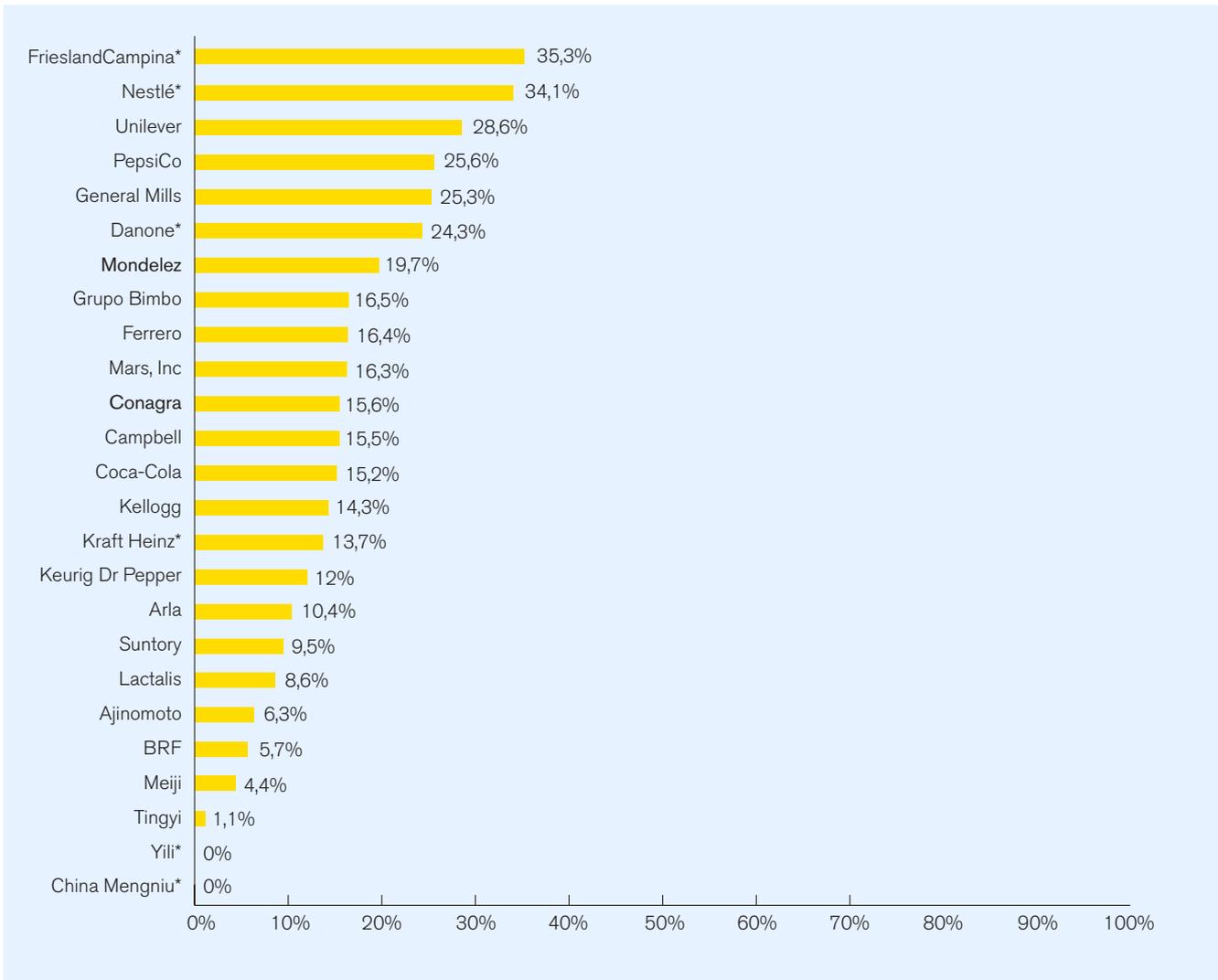
3.4 Disclosure

“Disclosure across all markets should be a fundamental part of a corporation’s license to operate. Because transparency laws are weak... does that mean investors should be blind to the risks posed?”

- Brianna Harrington, Harrington Investments, Inc.

Figure 4: Company scores: Disclosure

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A company can have the most ambitious policy commitments and the strongest management systems, but these will have no external credibility without public disclosures showing that policy commitments are complied with and that management systems are implemented and functioning in reality. Meanwhile being forthcoming about disclosing information on the *extent* and *how* the company has sought to influence policy, on what topics and what positions, is key if stakeholders are to be reassured that the company is acting proportionately and in line with the public interest. As the RLF's Transparency Principle (2) states: "Responsible lobbying organisations will be open, complete and truthful in their communications on the topic."⁸⁵

Disclosure was the section in which companies have room for the greatest improvement, with the average score being 15%, and only two companies exceeding 30%. This, in part, reflects the higher demands being placed on companies here, with more than twice as many indicators and a sizeable proportion of these having geographic and completeness 'multipliers' applied (see the Methodology section). Nevertheless, it also reflects that companies do not have systematic reporting processes in place. Disclosure tends to relate to specific geographies: the average geographic multiplier score was 0.7, meaning that average performance was between 'home market only' (0.5) and 'multiple markets' (0.75). For example, a company may only

disclose trade association memberships or political contributions in its home market, and not elsewhere.

Disclosure is also very rarely fully comprehensive: the average completeness multiplier score was 0.62 (out of 1.0): but in the majority of cases, it was 'partial or not specified' (0.5) (1.0 being 'comprehensive'). For example, a company might disclose that it lobbies on several topics but does not indicate if these are the only topics it lobbies on, or provides only an indicative list of trade associations it belongs to.

Moreover, companies rarely disclose on all aspects relevant to lobbying, often being more detailed in some areas while neglecting others. For example, a company might disclose a lot of information on its political donations and trade associations, but very little about its lobbying positions and expenditures.

FrieslandCampina and Nestlé scored highest in this section, disclosing specific information about their lobbying on several specific public health policy measures. The two companies also score comparatively higher on their disclosure of their specific lobbying activities (especially FrieslandCampina), and their disclosures' accessibility, comprehensiveness, assurance and alignment with external reporting frameworks. However, despite disclosing relatively higher amounts than other companies, the low top scores (33-34%) shows that there is still significantly more they could improve upon, especially regarding expenditures and trade associations.

Lobbying transparency registers

Often, companies only disclose their lobbying activities through transparency registers. A number of countries have such registers, including Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, the UK, and (most comprehensively) the US. While some are voluntary, most are mandatory: in order to access policymakers, it is required by law to disclose certain details about lobbying activities, such as expenditures, interactions, and third-parties; some also allow voluntary disclosures beyond basic requirements, such as the subjects of meetings. Companies that are active in these lobbying arenas tend to, but not always, provide links to some of these registers or mention them by name in their own reporting.

However, there are multiple reasons why it is important that companies go beyond relying on transparency registers for disclosure. The precise requirements and level of detail required varies greatly per country, and stakeholders have raised concerns that most registers have sizeable loopholes.⁸⁶ Secondly, such registers are relatively rare, as: few governments have developed them. Moreover, it requires significant labor from stakeholders to check each one, compounded by the fact that many are not very user-friendly. As such, it is important for companies to go beyond mandatory disclosure on public registries and publish information on their own domains, including lobbying-related information not required by law, such as activities in countries without mandatory disclosure.

3.4.1 Disclosure regarding specific public health measures/policies

It is crucial that companies disclose information about what types of policies they choose to lobby on globally and their specific positions on these topics. Doing so signals the company's priorities to stakeholders, but also enables scrutiny of their alignment with the public health interest (and the company's commitments in this regard), while further exhibiting a commitment to full transparency. Moreover, companies should be able to present a clear public interest case for their positions, demonstrating an awareness of the needs of the wider public, beyond corporate needs narrowly defined (Principle 1.1). In addition, transparency and accountability can be further strengthened by comprehensively reporting specific examples of specific proposals, bills, or legislation the company has lobbied on, disclosing relevant documents (such as consultation submissions) as much as possible.

Companies scored relatively low across the board on this sub-section, with the average score across these indicators (17-22) being 13.4%.



A notable exception is Friesland-Campina: in its Annual Report, the company publishes a comprehensive summary of stakeholder engagement for that year, including meetings with policymakers around the world, disclosing the offices or types of public officials with whom the company has interacted; the issues discussed; and outcomes sought.

Overall, twelve companies publish some information about nutrition-related topics they lobby on:

- Disclosure was most forthcoming in relation to FOP labelling policy: eleven companies disclosed that they lobby on this topic, and four companies (Danone, Nestle, PepsiCo, and Unilever) indicate their position and public interest justification for it.
- Regarding regulatory restrictions on marketing unhealthy foods to children, only Danone, FrieslandCampina, Nestle, and Unilever disclose that they lobby on this topic, while Campbell, Danone, FrieslandCampina, Nestle, and PepsiCo

indicate their position.

- Only four companies (Coca-Cola, Friesland-Campina, PepsiCo, and Unilever) disclose that they lobby on the topic of fiscal measures to address obesity (such as taxation of products high in added sugar). Coca-Cola and PepsiCo clearly indicate that they oppose such measures, while Unilever indicates its support, provided certain conditions are met. FrieslandCampina, meanwhile, voluntarily discloses specific examples of engaging governments on this topic, such as with the Ministry of Health of Malaysia on sugar taxation in 2020.

Meanwhile four companies (Danone, Friesland-Campina, General Mills, and Kellogg) disclose that they lobby to influence national dietary guidelines. All indicate that they have done so in the US, with the exception of FrieslandCampina, which engaged on the (Dutch) national Prevention Agreement (which includes national dietary guidelines).



Notably, General Mills publishes on its website links to its formal statements and public consultation submissions on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, enabling clear scrutiny of the company's specific position and outcomes sought.



Of note is Unilever, which publishes a relatively comprehensive range of 'Advocacy and Policy Asks' on its website,⁸⁷ while in its 'Position on Sugar' and 'Position on Nutrition Labeling' documents, the company provides additional detail, publicly specifying under which conditions the company would support (or not support) certain policies.^{88, 89}

3.4.2 Trade associations: memberships, dues, and activities

Disclosing trade association memberships is also essential for lobbying transparency, given the extent to which lobbying is often carried out by such groups and the risk that they may lobby for positions contradictory to the company's, or in ways that go against the company's lobbying policy. In addition, companies can indicate the relative importance of

certain trade associations by noting which it holds Board seats on and by disclosing the amounts of dues it pays that are specifically used for lobbying. Publishing descriptions of the main activities undertaken by the trade associations, or purpose of being a member, is also key for helping stakeholders understand what these associations are doing on behalf of the company. While much of this information may be available on third party websites (such as transparency registers or trade association domains), disclosing it on the company's own domain greatly reduces the labor required for stakeholders to scrutinize these memberships, and signals a clear commitment to transparency on this topic.

This was one of the lowest scoring areas of Disclosure on average (11.6%, across indicators 23 to 26), with no company meeting the full demands of any of the indicators, and few particularly notable best practices to highlight, especially with regards to comprehensive disclosure.

While most companies assessed provide some information on trade association memberships, no companies publish comprehensive lists that are global in scope. The remainder disclose only partial lists, either restricted by geographical scope, providing indicative lists (e.g. of "key" associations), or only disclosing those to which it pays dues over a certain threshold. For example, Danone, Nestlé, Mars, FrieslandCampina, Unilever, and Grupo Bimbo disclose membership lists that are global in scope, but are by no means comprehensive; meanwhile Conagra and KDP indicate that their membership disclosure is complete, but primarily focus on their home markets (the US).

For the trade associations they disclose, seven companies disclose the portion of membership dues paid that are specifically used for lobbying purposes: all of these are US-based companies, where it is a legal requirement to do so on the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) website, although they go beyond requirements by disclosing on their own domains. However, they did not provide this information beyond their home markets. Meanwhile, only five companies (Danone, Nestlé, Meiji, Mars, and Kellogg) indicate which associations the company holds Board seats on.

Beyond the disclosing the names and dues paid, companies generally did not publish further information about the purpose of these memberships, nor the activities undertaken by the associations: Nestlé does so for trade associations relating to climate change and the environment only, while Meiji offers a general description of its role in the International Dairy Federation, a global industry group for the dairy industry.⁹⁰

Only two companies publish evidence of engaging with their trade associations to align their positions and standards to those of the company:



Kraft Heinz, for example, publishes a letter of instruction to its trade associations stipulating that trade associations dues must only be used "on issues of importance to our business and none may be provided to support or oppose political candidates."⁹¹



FrieslandCampina, meanwhile, publishes a list of issues it engaged with a range of trade associations on as part of its Stakeholder Engagement disclosure.⁹²

However, no companies were found to publish reviews of their trade association memberships, or any decisions made where misalignment was found (or statement that none was found). This is despite this becoming an increasingly common practice among companies in relation to climate change lobbying: examples of such trade association reviews can be found on InfluenceMap's website.⁹³

3.4.3 Expenditures on lobbyists (in-house and third-party)

Disclosing the amounts spent on lobbyists is another key indicator of the extent to which a company is lobbying, and allows stakeholders (particularly investors) to judge whether it is proportionate or not. Ideally, such disclosures should be made per market, enabling stakeholders to understand where companies are focusing their efforts. 18 companies disclose these amounts for specific markets, but only where they are legally required (such as on the US, EU and French lobbying registers), with the

figures being available on third-party websites. Kraft Heinz, General Mills, Coca-Cola, Campbell, and PepsiCo, also publish their US figures on their own domains; Nestlé, meanwhile, publishes its US, EU, and French expenditures.

However, no companies disclosed information about their lobbying expenditures in more than three (major markets, yet alone any market that does not require such disclosures by law. As the recent Coca-Cola and PepsiCo shareholder resolutions demonstrate,⁹⁴ stakeholders are demanding such transparency to be provided *voluntarily* by the companies, in order for their responsible lobbying claims to be taken seriously.

3.4.4 Whistleblowing mechanisms

To give stakeholders confidence that company whistleblowing mechanisms are being used and issues being resolved, it is important that companies disclose information on the number of cases raised annually, the number of cases resolved, breakdowns (for example by geography or business unit) to show where hotspots might be, and information on the types of resolution.

 **Grupo Bimbo, Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Unilever provide this level of disclosure.**

BRF, Mondelez and Suntory disclose the number of cases raised and one or two of the other disclosures, while Arla, Danone, FrieslandCampina,

and Meiji only disclose the number of cases raised. While all companies bar one have whistleblowing mechanisms in place, the remaining companies assessed do not disclose any information about the reports received through their whistleblowing mechanisms.

3.4.5 Disclosure of lobbying policy

Six companies (Arla, Campbell, Danone, FrieslandCampina, Mondelez, and Nestlé) publish a stand-alone lobbying policy;

 **with Danone, FrieslandCampina, and Nestlé stating that theirs are approved by their respective Board.**

Other companies publish their lobbying policy as part of a broader policy or document, for example, as a set of business principles or code of conduct. Interestingly, Danone, FrieslandCampina and Nestlé all scored in the top group of companies on the overall assessment, suggesting that having a stand-alone, Board-approved lobbying policy is an indicator of a company having a more mature and comprehensive approach to responsible lobbying overall. Whether having such a policy is a cause or consequence of having a mature approach would require further research.



4. Conclusions and recommendations



Responsible lobbying is an important and emerging issue in the F&B sector, given increasing stakeholder scrutiny on the topic (especially from investors) and the urgency of addressing global diet-related public health crises, including through policy measures.

This report, which presents the results of their lobbying policy commitments, management systems and disclosure benchmarked against the Responsible Lobbying Framework, finds that there is wide variation in company maturity on the subject, and no company is close to full maturity. Given that the majority of companies score below 33%, and the highest scoring company scores only 50%, there is a lot of room for improvement. This is especially the case for Disclosure, with only two companies scoring over 30%.

While the results are hardly cause for celebration, it should also be borne in mind that for (most of) the companies assessed, this is the first time they have been benchmarked against the Responsible Lobbying Framework, which is a relatively new framework and represents a relatively nascent topic. Therefore, these results represent a baseline from which companies are expected to progress. Encouragingly, many best practices were identified relating to almost all elements of the RLF companies were assessed against, meaning that, were companies to emulate their peers' practices, near-full compliance would be within reach.

Nevertheless, this report has identified key gaps in food and beverage companies' current lobbying practices, especially around disclosure and activities via trade associations. As a consequence of these gaps, cases of companies (and their trade associations) lobbying both against the public health interest and in a manner inconsistent with the term 'responsible lobbying' have been repeatedly documented in all regions around the world (see Box 1). This has resulted in a considerably negative perception of industry's role in influencing policy among responsible investors, public health stakeholders, and policymakers, and a substantial lack of trust that their influence can be positive.

The companies assessed in this report are therefore challenged to act upon the recommendations outlined below (and in their respective scorecards) as an important first step to remedy this. This is

especially the case for companies who consider themselves to be a positive force for nutrition and public health beyond profit, and which truly believe there needs to be a level the playing-field with their competitors and desires sector-wide transformation.

The ultimate hope is that, by adopting the principles and sub-principles of the Responsible Lobbying Framework, their lobbying efforts be more aligned with the public health interest and international policy goals (such as SDGs 2 and 3, and the WHO Action Plans). Crucially, however by being more transparent about their lobbying activities, especially in markets without mandatory disclosure requirements, this will foster greater trust and accountability with key stakeholders, by showing where the company is spending its money, which third-parties are active lobbying on its behalf (and how they are managing these relationships), and what the company is trying to achieve. As long as these elements remain hidden, stakeholders will continue to assume the worst, and companies and the wider industry faces considerable risks.

Below are some practical steps and key recommendations based on the findings.

4.1 Practical steps

Start with easy wins:

All companies – from the highest- to the lowest-ranked – can secure a few, if not many, quick wins. Since this is the first time the majority of companies featured in this benchmarked have been benchmarked against the Responsible Lobbying Framework, many may have been unaware of certain asks and specific disclosures that are considered important for transparency and accountability. As such, things the company *already* does or has data for, but does not publish, could easily be disclosed – without starting a whole new process. For example, some companies shared internal policies that were not credited because this assessment includes publicly available information only – and the policies should be made external for transparency and accountability.

In addition, where companies have made policy commitments, it is not unreasonable to expect that

they have management systems in place to implement these and ensure adherence. Again, however, these were not always referred to in publicly available sources. Moreover, where such policies and systems are in place, they should also generate the information that could be included in disclosures against many of the indicators included in this assessment.

Another potentially 'easy win' for a company is to clearly state what it *does* not do. Such information is useful to stakeholders, since it removes uncertainty about the company's lobbying practices and averts speculation about hidden activities. This is particularly applicable for disclosures in relation to: lobbying on specific policy measures and topics; which markets the company is (not) active lobbying in; and whether (or not) companies have identified areas of misalignment with trade associations, employment conflicts of interest, or non-compliance with its ABC policy, for example. It should be borne in mind, however, that were such statements to be made, the company would be liable to be called out and held accountable if found to be in contradiction to them.

Learn from peers

The highest scoring companies demonstrated a somewhat more systematic approach to responsible lobbying processes, as shown by the high correlation between their scores in each section, which indicates that they make certain responsible lobbying commitments, have management systems in place to ensure consistency and internal compliance; and are starting to make some of their lobbying disclosures global and complete (though even the leaders have a long way to go in this area).

Responsible lobbying is a pre-competitive issue, and therefore peer-to-peer learning would be possible. Companies are encouraged to take note of the best practices from their peers identified in the analysis above, and study the [scorecards](#) of some of the frontrunners. ATNI will also explore if it can facilitate more peer-to-peer learning in the immediate future, for example through roundtables, workshops, and other mechanisms to bring companies together.

4.2 Priorities for progress

Expand disclosure

No companies' lobbying disclosures were found to be global in coverage and complete in terms of the activities they describe. Most lobbying-related disclosures cover their home market only, or a few markets at best, and often do not indicate whether the disclosures they make are comprehensive. Disclosures often appear to be compliance-led, being made to European Union, United States, and French lobbying registers as a pre-condition for access to lawmakers. This reveals a lack of ambition to go beyond compliance and disclose in a more comprehensive manner, to improve transparency.

We recognize that disclosing on all lobbying activities in all markets can be challenging, particularly for global companies which can be active in more than 100 markets. That said, companies could start by extending disclosures to the markets where they spend the most on lobbying, or are most active in general, but which do not demand mandatory disclosure – especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). They could also clearly indicate which markets they do *not* lobby, or belong to any trade associations, for example.

Companies could also consider integrating lobbying data into their existing global internal reporting systems: Many companies have such systems for reporting on other ESG-related data, in which market-level results are reported to the global headquarters and published – so could the same not happen for lobbying? This would also enable the company to better manage their lobbying operations, especially as it has been claimed by companies' global headquarters that they do not always know what is taking place on-the-ground, at market-level, across all their markets.

Trade associations

Beyond a doubt, trade associations are key actors in lobbying by the food and beverage industry, and arguably carry the highest risk, since they can take lobbying positions that are contrary to the company's own and remove direct responsibility for the worst abuses in lobbying from companies themselves.

It is therefore concerning that very few companies were found to review their trade associations systematically and at Board-level, or outline specific measures taken in cases of disagreement, indicating that they do not consider this a significant risk. Of the companies that do conduct such reviews, such as Nestlé, the results are not disclosed, which leaves investors in the dark about the extent of alignment and what lobbying activities are being undertaken on behalf of the company. This lack of transparency also extends to disclosure of trade association memberships, lobbying dues paid, Board seats held, and the purpose of these memberships. Insufficient management systems and disclosure in relation to trade associations, preventing external scrutiny and risk identification.

By not being forthcoming about their trade associations and reviewing their relationships, this could be interpreted by stakeholders as, at best, indifference to their lobbying activities, but at worst, as tacit endorsement. As the experience of many other large companies demonstrates in relation to climate change lobbying, as well as the recent examples relating to Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, investors *do* consider companies responsible for the actions of their trade associations. It is therefore essential that companies step up their systems for reviewing and managing relationships with trade associations, and make greater efforts to be transparent about their memberships, especially if they expect to be considered a 'responsible lobbying' company.

4.3 Reinforcing progress

Auditing lobbying activities, internal compliance, and disclosures:

Putting in place audit procedures to verify compliance with lobbying policies, management systems, and public disclosures has a wide range of benefits, from improving the functioning of these processes to building trust with stakeholders in the companies' procedures and disclosures. While auditing is a well-established and widely used tool, it is not yet applied to lobbying among food and beverage companies.

We suggest companies start involving internal audit departments as a first step; in practice, companies' approaches will vary depending on how they set up compliance control in general and the structure of responsibilities. Companies that have well-resourced audit / compliance departments can start by involving such functions in overseeing lobbying. Others that have stand-alone audit programs can extend the scope of such programs to include lobbying.

Commissioning third-party audits will further increase stakeholders' confidence in the results, however, no evidence of companies using external audits was found. More importantly, external auditing has the potential to further identify deficiencies in the current systems and help improve management in the long run.

Stakeholder engagement on lobbying positions and activities

As explained in 3.2.5, engaging legitimate stakeholder groups in the process of developing lobbying positions and strategies can bring many distinct benefits, and should result in lobbying better aligned with the public health interest. However, only one company makes an explicit commitment to do so, and no companies were found to disclose any specific examples, despite this being an increasingly common practice with regards to other business practices. Not only are companies encouraged to start doing so, but they should be transparent as possible about such engagements and partnerships, to allow other stakeholders to scrutinize their legitimacy (especially if there is a risk of conflict of interest) and be reassured that the interests truly being represented are truly in the public health interest.

4.4 Going forward

Now that gaps in responsible lobbying practices have been identified, best practices highlighted, and practical recommendations made, companies are well-placed to step up and improve their lobbying commitments, management systems and disclosure. The report also equips other stakeholders, especially investors, to engage with these companies to act on these recommendations and apply consistent

pressure on them to increase transparency and change their practices in accordance with the RLF.

However, ATNI understands that companies face challenges to achieving these aims, and things are rarely so straightforward in practice. There is therefore a significant need for dialogue with and between industry actors to deepen understanding of these barriers to progress (especially on the more fundamental priorities described above), to facilitate peer-to-peer learning, and develop a roadmap for progress.

In addition, there are many other stakeholders with active interest in and doing valuable work on the topic of lobbying by the food and beverage industry on public health measures, including civil society, academia, responsible investors, and policymakers. Among these groups a variety of approaches are being taken and different pressure points being targeted; this report represents only one piece of the puzzle in seeking to change company lobbying practices and bringing about greater transparency and accountability for their activities. ATNI recognizes, however, that these dots need to be connected and key questions need to be answered through shared expertise.

- Can we reach wider consensus on a definition of 'responsible lobbying' and its elements?
- What are the most important elements of lobbying disclosure, and how do we ensure that greater transparency on these translates into greater accountability (and, therefore, better practice)?
- Can we track industry lobbying activities (on-the-ground) more systematically? What is needed to achieve this?
- How do we better monitor channels of influence that were beyond the scope of this report, such as constituency-building and informational strategies?

While nothing is stopping companies from increasing their disclosure voluntarily, the findings demonstrate that mandatory lobbying disclosure requirements remain the key driver of transparency on this topic. Therefore, *all* actors – industry, investors, and the wider stakeholder community – are encouraged to join **calls for policymakers to develop or improve legislation around lobbying disclosure** at country-level.



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