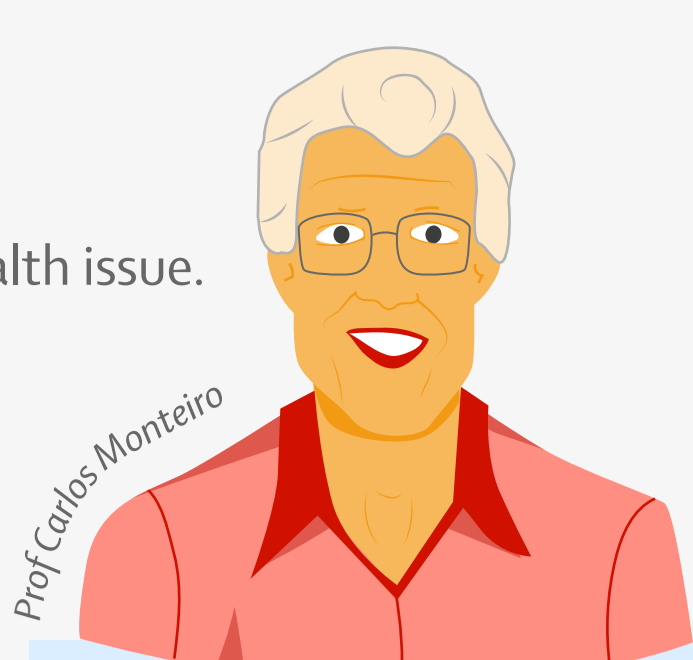
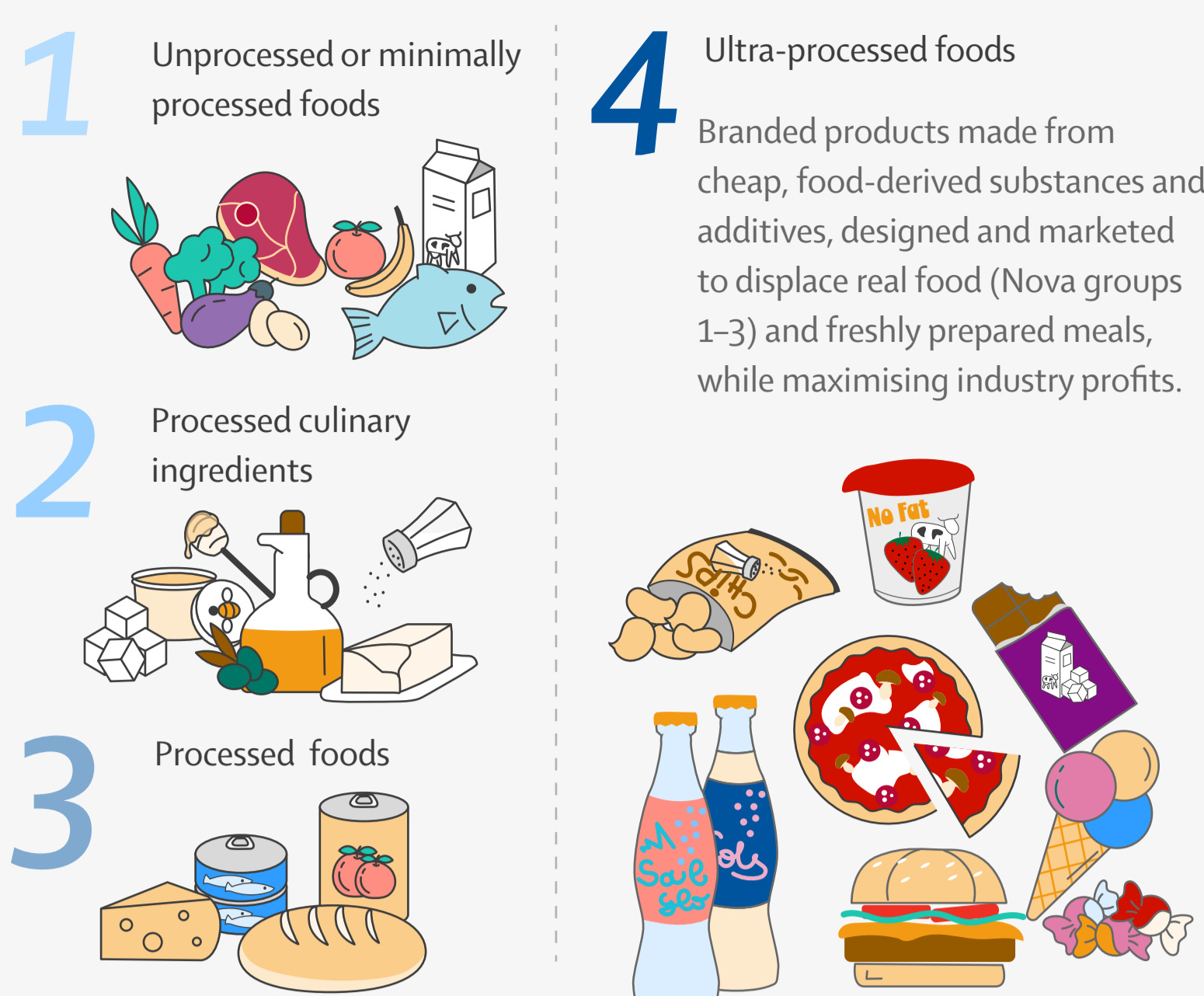


# The Lancet Series on Ultra-Processed Foods and Human Health

Now is the time to act on Ultra Processed Foods (UPFs) as a global health issue.

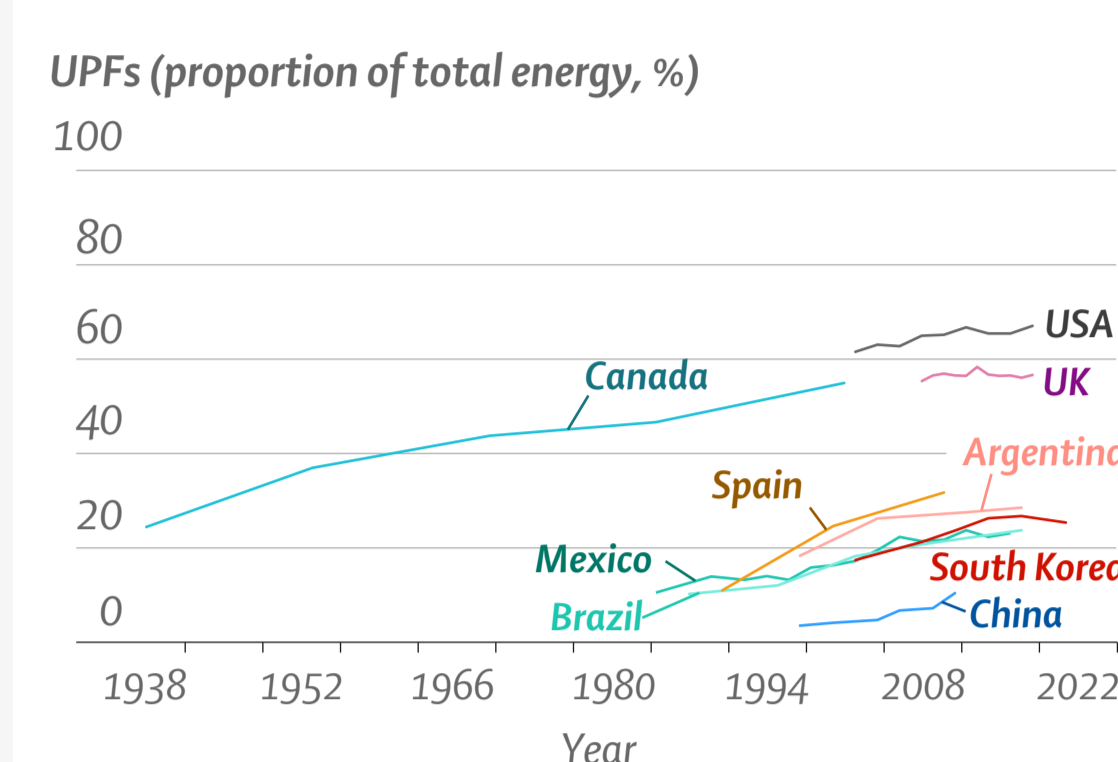
**Nova: the food classification based on the extent and purpose of processing**



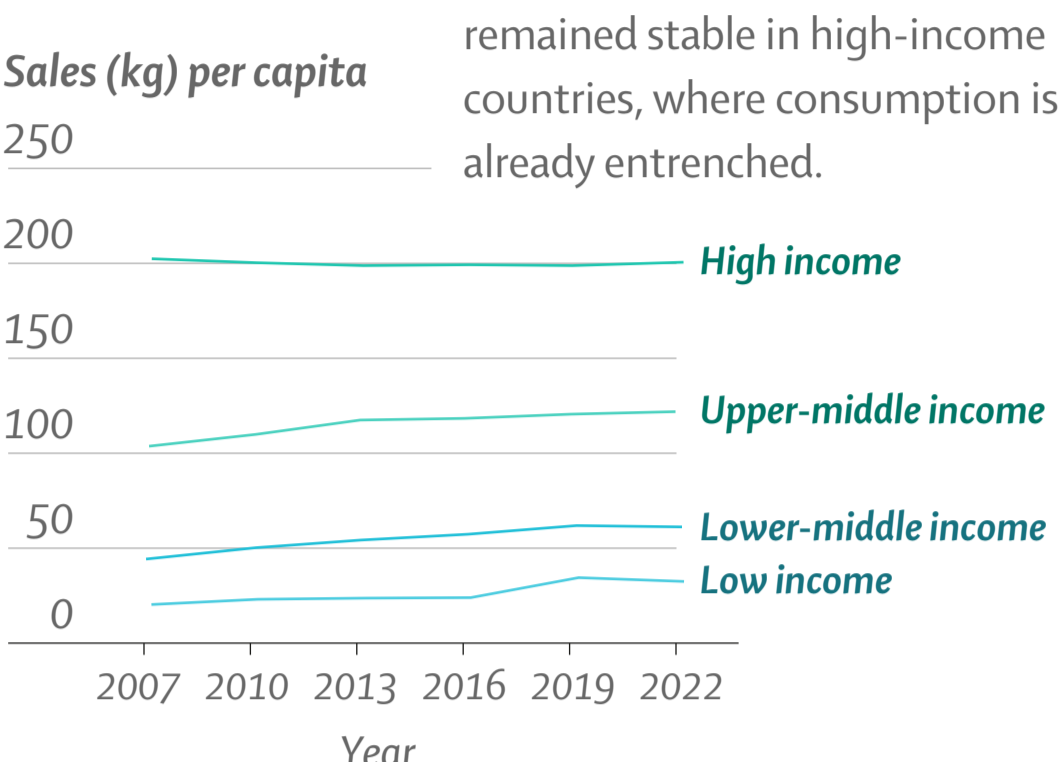
20 years ago, while studying changes in Brazil's food supply linked to rising obesity, we realised that the purpose of food processing had shifted from preserving foods to creating profitable substitutes using cheap food substances and additives. That insight led us to create the Nova classification—with its fourth group of ultra-processed foods—to capture not just nutrients, but also the extent and purpose of food processing as a key determinant of diet quality and risk of ill health.

## The ultra-processed dietary pattern is globally displacing diets based on Nova groups 1–3 and their preparation as dishes and meals.

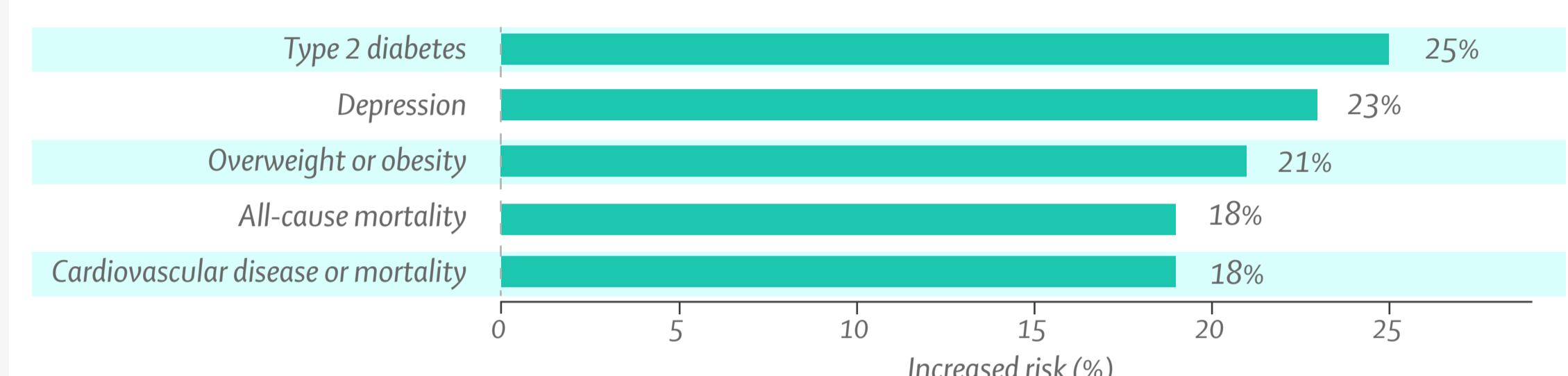
The energy contribution of UPFs to diets has surged globally over recent decades



From 2007 to 2022, **total UPF sales increased in low-income and middle-income countries**, but remained stable in high-income countries, where consumption is already entrenched.

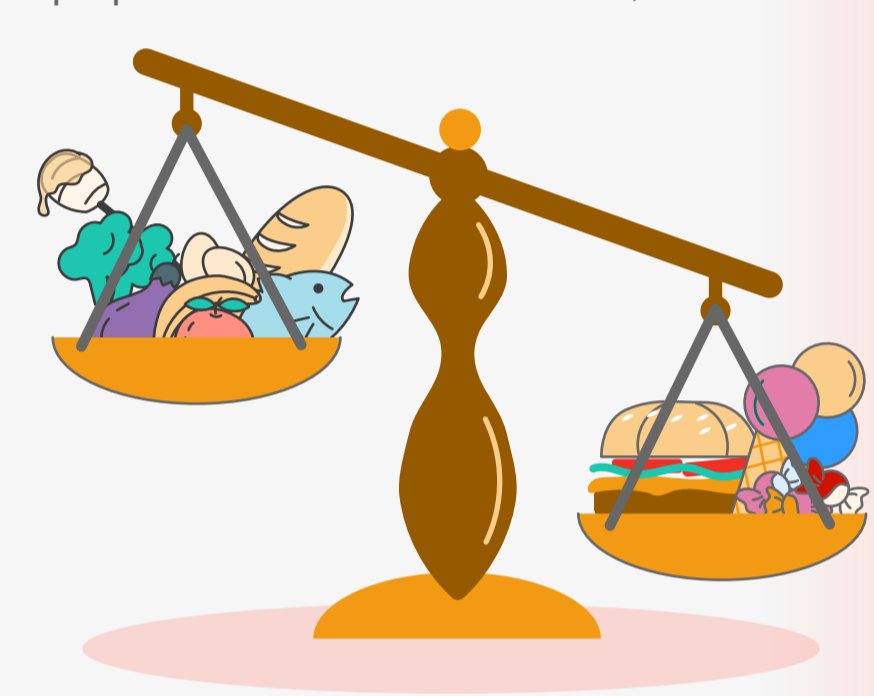


Our systematic review of **104 studies** found **92** showing an association between the ultra-processed dietary pattern and increased risk of one or more chronic disease outcomes. Meta-analyses of 15 outcomes found statistically significant associations with adverse health conditions for 12, including:

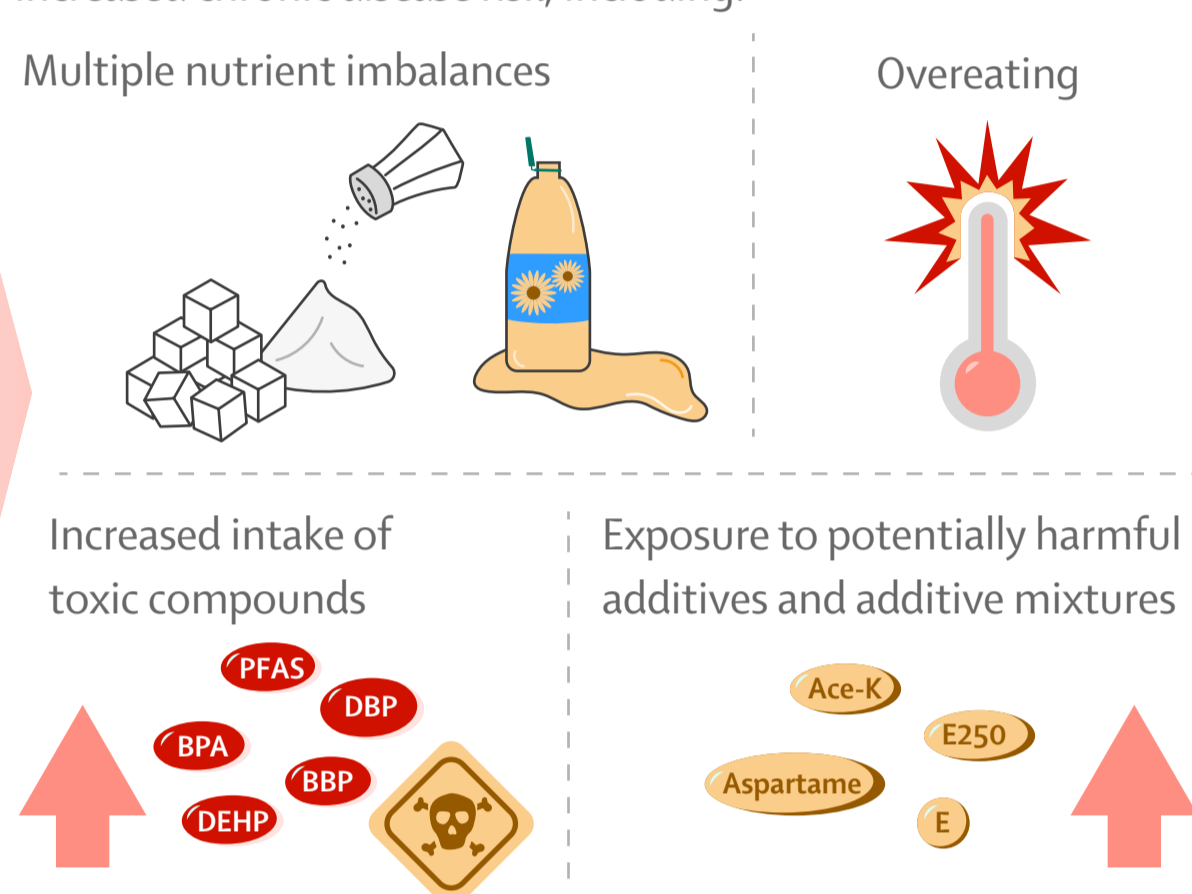


### The totality of evidence shows that

The ultra-processed dietary pattern has displaced, and continues to displace, long-established patterns based on the first three first Nova groups and their preparation as dishes and meals, ...



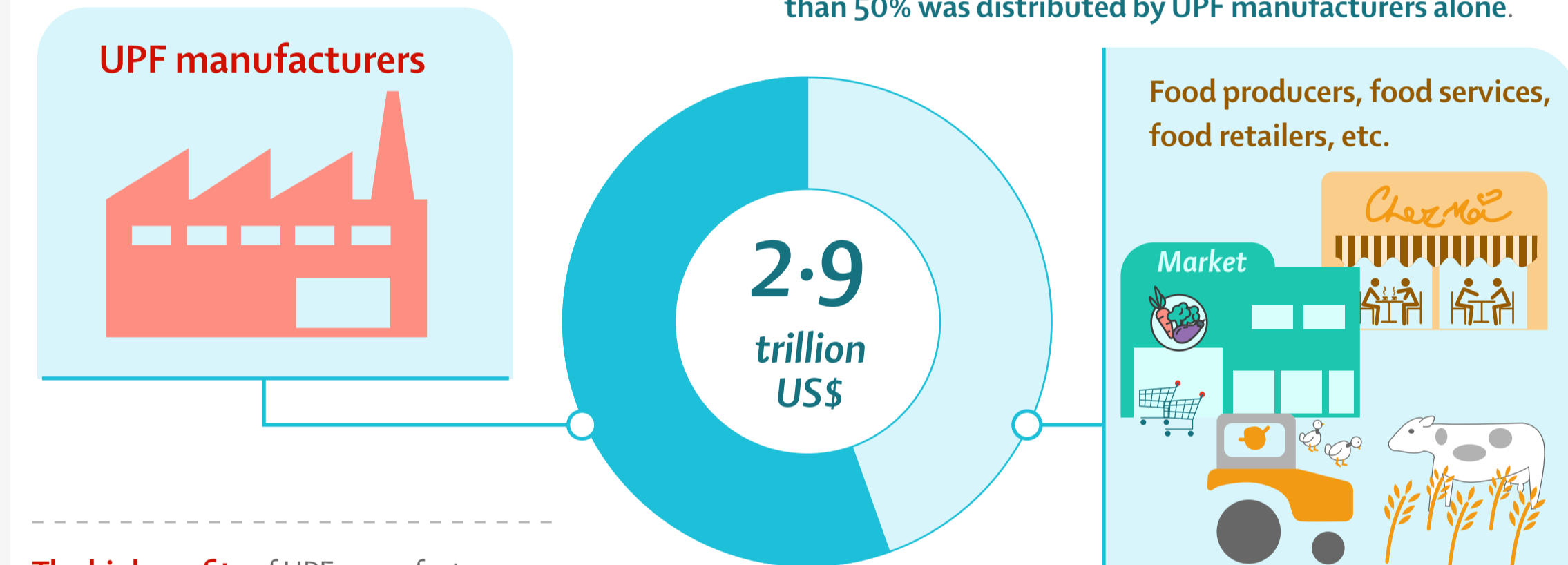
...several plausible mechanisms explain associations with increased chronic disease risk, including:



Taken together, these findings support the thesis that the ultra-processed dietary pattern is a major driver of the escalating global burden of diet-related chronic diseases. Public health policies and actions are justified at all levels to preserve, protect, and promote diets based on whole foods, and their preparation as dishes and meals.

### Ultra-processing is highly profitable

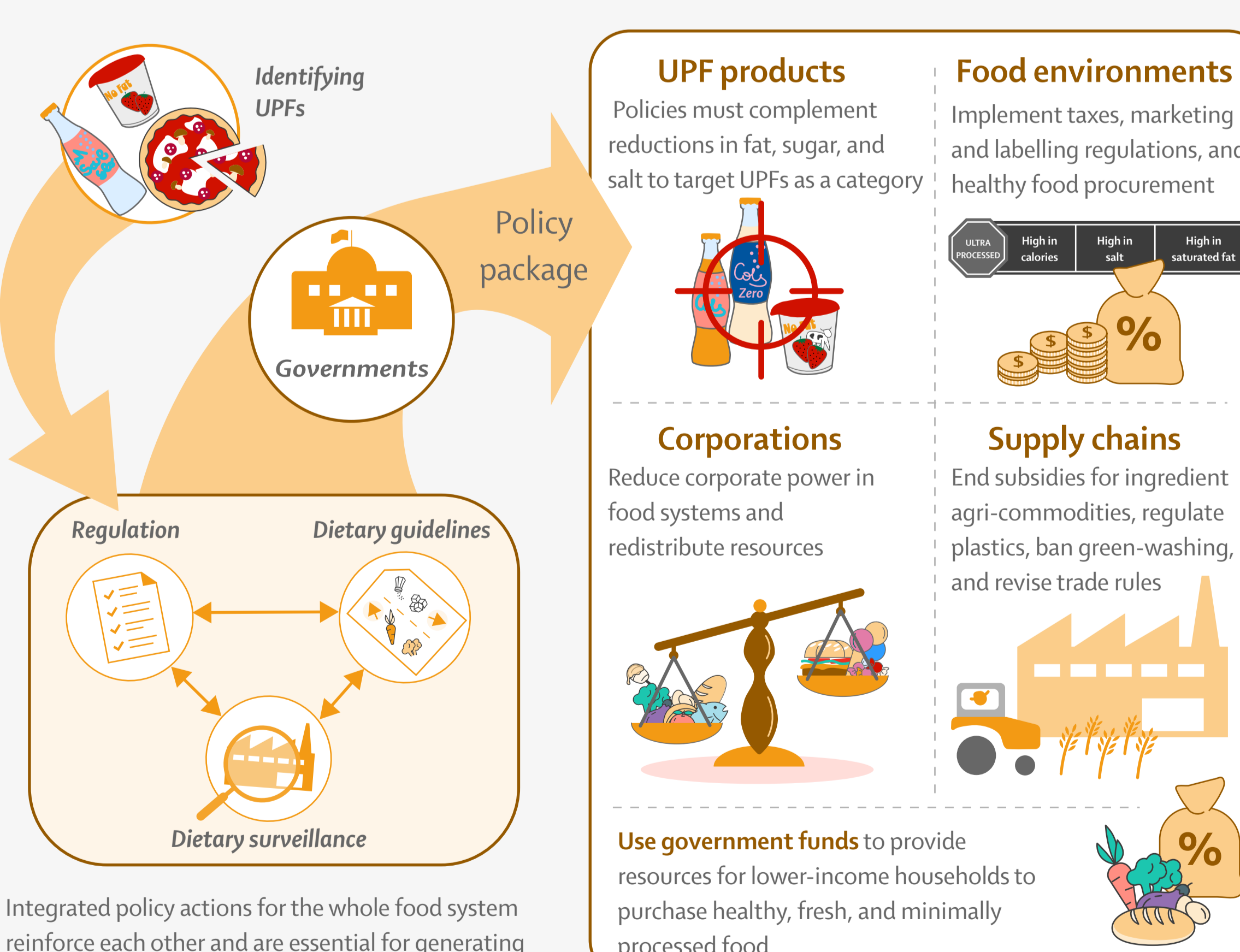
Between 1962 and 2021, of the **US\$2.9 trillion** in shareholder payouts by corporations operating across all food sectors, **more than 50% was distributed by UPF manufacturers alone.**



The high profits of UPF manufacturers provides them with surplus resources for:



### Improving diets cannot rely on consumer behaviour change alone—it also requires policies that regulate UPF marketing and production, confront corporate power, and reshape food systems to prioritise health, justice, and sustainability, over corporate profits.



### A global health response is urgent and feasible

- **Prioritise UPFs as a global health issue**  
Political action on UPFs has low priority despite the chronic disease burden; viewing them as commercially driven, like tobacco, shifts blame to corporate accountability.
- **Multilevel coalition-building**  
Build coalitions globally and nationally, uniting civil society, experts, government officials, UN agencies, and media to drive policy change and counter corporate power.
- **Ensure a just transition to low-UPFs diets**  
Policies should integrate participatory governance, economic inclusion, and household support while ensuring food security and gender equity, and avoiding stigma.
- **The recipe for collective action**  
Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa show how to scale: mobilise civil society, recruit political champions, and use advocacy, media, and research to drive policy change.

The Lancet Series on Ultra-Processed Foods and Human Health  
The Lancet 2025; published online November 18. <https://www.thelancet.com/series-do/ultra-processed-food>.

Read this Series online at [thelancet.com/series](https://www.thelancet.com/series) | Publish with us | Explore our author resources for a seamless submission process. [thelancet.com/for-authors](https://www.thelancet.com/for-authors)