

Statement by UNICEF on agenda item 4: “European regional action framework for behavioural and cultural insights for health, 2022–2027”

(EUR/RC72/4)

Thank you. I am here today representing UNICEF in this annual event, that brings so many actors together, all working to promote health in each country in the European Region. It is an honour to be here, and especially during this particular session.

As the United Nations agency for children, UNICEF is always supporting, promoting and improving healthy and protective behaviors for children like breastfeeding, immunization, education and positive discipline. We are aware that children’s wellbeing is a consequence of what they do and decide themselves, and of the choices made by their parents, guardians, communities, influencers, health service providers and authorities.

UNICEF has been a leader in the field Social and Behavior Change for over 35 years. With over 400 staff fully dedicated to it on the ground, and thousands more supporting behavioral work in different sectors. UNICEF has probably the largest institutional behavioral workforce in the world, leading coordination mechanisms for community engagement in emergencies, and social accountability mechanisms at global and country level.

UNICEF also leads or supports many SBC global initiatives: such as the International SBCC Summit; the Global Alliance for Social and Behavior Change the Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform; and the Vaccination Demand Hub.

Over the years, UNICEF work on communication for development has expanded to be more effective in triggering Social and Behaviour Change. This gradual shift enables us to effectively advocate for the right policies; to successfully promote and sustain positive behaviours in children, parents and institutions; and to design friendly health services that respond to children’s needs.

We capture insights using the best and latest Social and Behavioral Science, such as behavioral assessments, social listening, community insights and rapid research. And we convert them into knowledge, skills and strategies such as a people-centered design for services, digital engagement solutions, community-led approaches, behavioural solutions and nudges. The end result is improved services, better behaviours, strong policies resulting in stronger sectoral systems and better health.

When it comes to health, we work hand in hand with WHO to support Ministries of health and governments.

In our region we see vaccine hesitancy increasing, child obesity spreading, delays in care seeking, slow uptake of screenings and low compliance with therapies.

The work on social and behavioral change is an essential tool to address all these challenges. When we gain more insight on the determinants of behaviours impacting health, we succeed in crafting effective messages, designing better ways to provide health services, mobilizing communities and improve policies... with a strong positive health impact.

There are many examples in the region. In immunization, where

- we have learnt how to track rumours in real time and provide positive messages through online platforms, social media, talk shows;
- we have managed to gain insight from communities in humanitarian situations to then mobilize them, effectively changing the social norms and what the expected behaviour;
- we have invested in demand generation for vaccines, creating opportunities for caregivers to express their concerns and expanding the health workers' capacity to engage convincingly with them;
- we have involved opinion leaders, community leaders, religious leaders, to build trust in the health system, and much more.

All the above is already happening in many countries in the European region.

Still, we do not see in all countries a sufficient investment in social and behaviour change, with adequate financial resources, and the creation of institutional mechanisms to regularly monitor behaviours and to intervene with evidence-based approaches.

In conclusion, we believe that the Regional Action Framework for behavioural and cultural insight for health is a solid tool that will help us to accelerate progress. UNICEF is committed, to keep supporting governments in this important area of work together with WHO and partners.
