

## TALKING POINTS

I would like to thank Ms. Khan for presenting the highlights of the draft Country Program Document for Bulgaria.

Bulgaria welcomes the new draft Country Program for the period 2023-2027 and we highly appreciate the support provided by the UNICEF Country Office in Bulgaria, especially for the preparation of the Program, which was done in close partnership with all relevant institutions.

The new Country Program is in support of the national efforts to guarantee the rights of all children in Bulgaria and improve their quality of life. The overarching goal of the Program is for girls and boys, young children and adolescents, particularly the most vulnerable, to have a better start in life, to be safer and to receive better support to develop their full potential. This is reflected in the three main components of the Program, namely, early childhood development and safety; quality inclusive education and adolescent empowerment; and social inclusion and monitoring of children's rights.

The new Country Programme has clear goals, objectives and structure, led by the guiding principles of considering the best interests of the child and involving children in decision-making on issues that affect them. We appreciate, in particular, the inclusion of modern challenges related to climate change and information technology.

The Program also focuses on the importance of systems strengthening and resilience building to shocks for the most vulnerable children. This is of particular significance in light of the multiple challenges we are facing - recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the influx of refugees as a result of the war in Ukraine, the economic and energy crises, to name a few.

Having mentioned the war in Ukraine, Bulgaria is currently hosting over 130 000 Ukrainian refugees who were forced to flee their country as a result of the illegal, unprovoked and unjustified aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. A large part of those refugees are children. The Bulgarian government is working hard to ensure that they receive the necessary assistance. We work in close cooperation with UNICEF on a number of aspects, including on ensuring adequate access to education. I take this opportunity to commend UNICEF for their outstanding work to respond to and provide for the needs of the Ukrainian children.

Lastly, the protection and promotion of the rights of the child is a main priority for Bulgaria. This is reflected in all our policies and actions. We are a strong advocate for children's rights in the international fora, including through co-chairing the **Group of Friends of Children and Sustainable Development Goals**. In 2021, together with France, UNICEF and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children, we were part of the core group on the "**Declaration on the Rights of the Child in the Digital Environment**". In June Bulgaria also joined the **Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict to the EU**. We highly value our active and fruitful cooperation with UNICEF on issues of mutual interest aimed at enhancing the wellbeing of children. We look forward to our membership in the Executive Board

of UNICEF for the period 2023-2025 and to collaborating with UNICEF for the full realization of the rights of children globally.