

SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE

A Playbook for Effective Advocacy
on the Prevention of Childhood
Overweight and Obesity

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Overview

Childhood overweight and obesity is a global child rights crisis affecting nearly 380 million children around the world. With a few notable exceptions, policy efforts have largely fallen short, hampered by industry interference as well as harmful and unhelpful narratives that blame individuals and perpetuate stigma. Advocacy efforts need to shift the narrative towards promoting healthy food environments that uphold the right to nutrition in the places where children live, learn, eat, play and meet.

This document provides a clear and evidence-based strategy for UNICEF and partners on how to communicate key concepts for the prevention of childhood overweight and obesity. This issue and its solutions, clouded in misconceptions and social stigma, are complicated to communicate. While recognizing that this document doesn't cover every important topic in this space (e.g., school food policies, community engagement), it focuses on the five most challenging concepts to communicate about: failing food systems, misleading labels, harmful marketing to children, sugary drinks tax and junk food villains. Behavioural science shows the importance of getting the messaging correct for these tough topics to communicate effectively across different audiences. It's all about narrative and the story we tell.

UNICEF's narrative positions all forms of malnutrition – including overweight and obesity – as a violation of children's rights. Our narrative recognizes the systemic drivers of childhood overweight and obesity and calls on governments to prioritize actions for tackling them as part of nutrition and health policymaking. This includes creating actions plans, allocating budgets, and designing, implementing, and enforcing our core set of food environment regulatory policies – while protecting policymaking from the food and beverage industry's influence.

This is not an easy task. We must shift the public conversation away from a focus on individuals and towards generating demand for policy action that supports an enabling environment, for all children. While it is important to communicate effectively with the food and beverage industry to change these harmful practices, evidence shows that self-regulation is not sufficient. This means that our priority advocacy audiences are the public and policymakers.

The purpose of this document is to help UNICEF teams and partners strategically frame core concepts around the issue of childhood overweight and obesity, with specific communication messaging for three key audiences: the public, policymakers and the food and beverage industry. We build on UNICEF's foundational technical expertise, abiding by key guiding principles that are rooted in behaviour insights research, and avoiding perpetuating further stigma.



Introduction

1 Introduction

OUR CASE

The concept of child malnutrition has historically been associated with hunger and undernutrition. These are recognizable, global problems that audiences understand and can easily empathize with.

However, overweight and obesity is another form of malnutrition with equally serious consequences—for the children affected and society at large. Unhealthy diets, overweight and obesity are a rapidly growing challenge for millions of children around the world. They reflect a food system that is failing to deliver nutritious diets for children. In many contexts, this situation is further exacerbated by inequality, including financial, social, and structural injustices that mean some children cannot access nutritious and safe foods and/or are inundated with ultra-processed (i.e., ‘junk’) food. The prejudice and stigma that many children affected by overweight and obesity experience in their day-to-day lives also harms their mental health and self-esteem.

Starting at the earliest ages, overweight and obesity can have lifelong effects, burdening children and communities with health, social and economic impacts. This problem is:

URGENT AND GROWING

The latest figures available indicate that an estimated 5.6 per cent of the world’s children under the age of 5 – around 39 million – have overweight or obesity. This is a 33 per cent increase since 2000. This figure increases with age: more than 340 million children and adolescents aged 5–19 years have overweight or obesity.

A GLOBAL ISSUE

In the past, overweight and obesity were mostly a concern in high-income countries (HICs). But these patterns are changing quickly. With a rapidly increasing prevalence among urban and rural children, low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) now account for more than three quarters of all children living with overweight and obesity.

MISUNDERSTOOD AND COSTLY

Unhealthy diets and childhood overweight and obesity often lead to adverse health, social and financial consequences throughout life. But the costs typically only appear over time and later in life. The global economic impacts of obesity are estimated at US\$2 trillion, or 2.8 per cent of global gross domestic product – a similar economic impact to that of smoking or armed violence, war and terrorism.

A BLATANT MANIFESTATION OF INEQUALITY

In many countries, childhood overweight and obesity are intrinsically linked to socioeconomic, geographical and racial inequality, and often rooted in poverty. The burden of overweight and obesity is often much greater among lower socioeconomic groups – something we see in North America, Europe and Latin America. The pattern is beginning to repeat in other geographies too. The popular literature has coined the terms ‘food deserts’ and ‘food swamps’ to describe areas where nutritious and healthy alternatives are unaffordable to many and largely absent from children’s diets.

EMBEDDED IN STIGMA

Children suffering from overweight and obesity are victims twice: like any other child affected by malnutrition, they will likely suffer lifelong physical consequences to their growth and health; in addition, these children and their parents are often blamed for the problem and experience significant discrimination and bullying.

MALNUTRITION'S PERFECT STORM

Around the world, childhood overweight and obesity rarely occur in isolation. The different forms of malnutrition (stunting and wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity) often coexist in the same country, the same community, the same family, and even the same person. This is the 'triple burden of malnutrition'. As the face of malnutrition changes, it is important that the prevention of overweight and obesity be integrated as central to the global response to child malnutrition.

RECOGNIZED BY GLOBAL MANDATES

The need for action to promote healthy diets and prevent childhood overweight and obesity is widely supported by global mandates, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Rome Declaration on Nutrition, the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016–2025, United Nations General Assembly and World Health Assembly declarations and outcome documents on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases. More specifically, the establishment and subsequent recommendations of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity elevated the prevention of childhood overweight and obesity as an urgent priority.

AN ISSUE OF CHILD RIGHTS

There is also growing consensus that overweight, obesity and obesogenic environments are not only a public health nutrition concern but also a threat to children's rights. Governments and societies have an obligation and moral responsibility to act in the best interests of the child and to protect every child's right to nutrition. This includes effectively addressing the various harms associated with the marketing of unhealthy, ultra-processed food to children.

For these reasons, it is essential that this line of work be clearly incorporated into UNICEF's advocacy and communication priorities in the space of nutrition and development, through a clear set of policy asks and solutions aimed at both public and private sectors.

OUR KEY ARGUMENTS

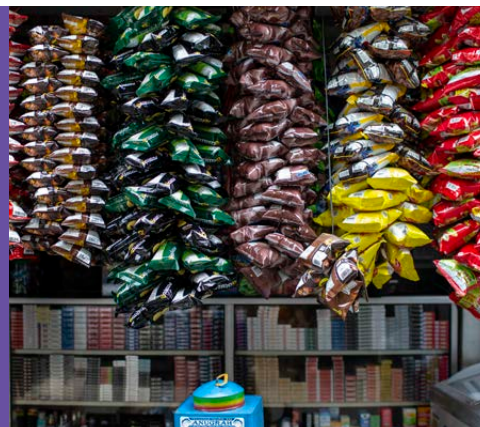
As UNICEF, we want to be an active, constructive, transformative player in the face of all forms of child malnutrition – including overweight and obesity. We want to make this a key child rights issue. To play this global role, our key arguments for accelerating action on childhood overweight and obesity are:

<p>There is a powerful narrative</p> <p>We want the challenge of childhood overweight and obesity to be known for what it is: a ubiquitous, expanding challenge, entangled in inequality and aggressive marketing strategies.</p>	<p>This is about protection</p> <p>We want children to be protected from ultra-processed (i.e., 'junk') foods and beverages, just as they are protected from tobacco, alcohol, or traffic accidents.</p>	<p>There are solutions</p> <p>We know meaningful progress can be made through existing evidence-based policy solutions. These policies are feasible and replicable, and we will work to make them happen.</p>
<p>This is a collective responsibility</p> <p>This is primarily a responsibility for public authorities to enact the necessary policies, regulations and programmes. But we need civil society and community organizations to play an active role.</p>	<p>This is about rights and accountability</p> <p>We want governments to act and use their regulatory powers to protect children's rights. We want global food and retail companies to take full responsibility for ensuring their policies, practices and products do not undermine children's rights.</p>	<p>This is a collective opportunity</p> <p>We see overweight and obesity among children as intrinsically linked to social inequalities and environmental depletion. In tackling the problem, we prioritize a better future for children and the planet.</p>

HIGHLIGHT

Food and beverage industry terminology

Food and beverage companies can play an important role in guaranteeing that all children have access to nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable food, no matter where they live. For the purposes of this document, we use the term ‘junk food companies’ to refer to food and beverage companies whose core business is the production, marketing and distribution of ultra-processed and unhealthy (i.e., ‘junk’) food and beverages that are detrimental to children’s nutrition, growth and development.



Our journey thus far

UNICEF’s global approach to preventing childhood overweight and obesity has developed incrementally since 2019. Key publications include:

- [UNICEF Programme Guidance](#)
- [UNICEF Advocacy Strategy and Guidance](#)
- [UNICEF Social & Behaviour Change Communications Toolkit for Country Teams](#)
- [UNICEF Advocacy Packages for Food Environment Policies](#)

An essential part of this journey has included developing plans for advocacy and for implementing public influencing initiatives around the prevention of childhood overweight and obesity. To inform these efforts, we have undertaken significant work around how to reframe the narrative around childhood overweight and obesity through creative storytelling, collaborating with 15 ‘front runner’ UNICEF offices to establish common advocacy priorities, and conducting a global audience segmentation analysis with 7,000 people across seven countries, including dozens of nutrition and food experts. Specifically, this global audience segmentation analysis provided rich insights for curating high-impact policy narratives.

OUR GLOBAL INSIGHTS

What do our global audiences tell us about how people perceive childhood overweight and obesity?

The most valuable insights from this global audience segmentation analysis, conducted by Glocalities, have been around how the public perceives the problem of childhood overweight and obesity. The quantitative study with 7,000 people across seven countries helped identify strategies for shifting the public narrative.

Here are some key findings that we can use to shape UNICEF's voice and messages (more on this below):

1. The protection of children is the highest concern for the public, everywhere. Nearly 9 in 10 people are highly concerned with child protection. However, respondents show more concern for issues like protecting children from mortality, undernutrition and food deprivation. Although 71 per cent of people are also concerned about childhood overweight and obesity, they don't see it as a child protection issue. They see it as important, but not urgent.

Implication for UNICEF: This is a strong entry point. UNICEF's voice on this topic must make the public realize that childhood overweight and obesity is a child protection issue of *urgent* concern. Children's rights to health and nutrition are being threatened by food environments that are often controlled by companies that produce, market and sell products that compromise children's physical and mental well-being. A meta-analysis¹ shows that strong fear appeal approaches, paired with high-efficacy messaging, can increase perceived severity and susceptibility of overall messages. The public, across all types of countries, cares intensely about child protection and is receptive to messaging around protecting children's right to have access to nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable food, no matter where they live. UNICEF should use its voice to highlight these connections.

2. Since childhood overweight and obesity is perceived as an individual's personal responsibility, government interventions to regulate the food industry are not naturally appealing. Focusing on regulations alone is 'loss-framing', meaning that it makes people think they are having options taken away from them for no reason, since they perceive the problem as an individual rather than a structural issue. However, when pressed further, there is support for certain policy measures.

Implication for UNICEF: A major barrier for our overall end goal of implementing food environment regulations is that the public doesn't instinctively support these measures. To address this resistance, we must prioritize shifting the public narrative away from individual responsibility towards an enabling environment. We can do this by reframing childhood overweight and obesity as a child

protection issue – i.e., that our current food environments are violating children's rights to nutritious food and a healthy future. Once it becomes a child protection issue, public demand will shift in favour of governments protecting and fulfilling these rights. This framing is critical to avoid this issue being perceived as a new imposition from public authorities. This will then open the door for public support, which we know exists when messages about regulations are gain-framed (i.e., when they focus on the positive outcomes to be gained).

3. School environments that promote good nutrition are a win-win in all contexts.

Implication for UNICEF: Holistic policies that support a) healthy and nutritious food options in school environments; b) keeping commercial interests and unhealthy food and beverages out of schools; and c) more time for physical activity, are popular across most contexts.

4. When it comes to making childhood overweight and obesity a child rights protection issue, there is limited difference between HICs and LMICs.

Implication for UNICEF: Our global communication strategy must be something that resonates across both HICs and LMICs, so that our diverse country offices can easily adapt and tailor the messaging to be more culturally relevant. In HICs, with more individualistic outlooks, we use the child rights lens to break stereotypes and reduce stigma by making people rethink childhood overweight and obesity. In LMICs, with more collective outlooks, we use the child rights lens to emphasize the need to protect our society's most vulnerable: children.

5. While childhood overweight and obesity is not explicitly considered a top public health concern for the general population, it is intimately connected to the top four concerns. The four greatest concerns were: pandemics (52 per cent), non-communicable diseases (45 per cent), health care (44 per cent) and mental health (44 per cent). These all ranked above childhood overweight and obesity (36 per cent).

¹ Witte & Allen (2000) A meta-analysis of fear appeals: implications for effective public health campaigns. Health Educ Behav. 27(5):591-615

Implication for UNICEF: Our voice as UNICEF needs to connect the dots and tell a compelling narrative that explains how childhood overweight and obesity are intimately connected to these four top public health concerns. When we fail to protect children from food environments that violate their rights to nutritious food and a healthy future, their physical and emotional health are at risk. In contrast, well-nourished children are more resilient in the face of disease, pandemics and emergencies. The best protection for our children's physical and emotional well-being, today and tomorrow, is to ensure every child grows up in a healthy food environment with fair access to nutritious food, no matter where they live.

6. The top two perceived causes of childhood overweight and obesity relate to physical inactivity, not food. This can lead to misconceptions and take the focus off unhealthy food.

Implication for UNICEF: Producers of ultra-processed, unhealthy (i.e., 'junk') foods and beverages have done a great job at making people focus on physical inactivity rather than their harmful products as the main driver of overweight and obesity. This is illustrated in slogans such as 'stay active and eat what you want'. It is now our job to shift this narrative towards the need to protect, promote and support healthy food options, and protect children from marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages.

7. All citizens agree: children spend too much time on screens. But their primary concern with screens is the lack of physical activity – not digital junk food marketing.

Implication for UNICEF: This is an interesting entry point; we can leverage the concern of the public that children spend too much time on screens with additional child protection messaging. Junk food companies are targeting our children through their screens, without us seeing, and threatening children's right to make their own choices for healthy food options and a healthy future. Digital junk food marketing promotes unhealthy options full of cheap ingredients that boost food company profits at the expense of our children's physical and mental health.

8. Citizens around the world want the food and beverage industry to provide healthier options.

Implication for UNICEF: Although speaking to the private sector is not our primary advocacy priority, this is an obvious core message for UNICEF to harness with food industry. People want healthy options for all children and families, everywhere. The market is moving towards healthier and more sustainable options.

9. All citizens, in all countries, think that parents are the most important actors who can help address childhood overweight and obesity. Parents are considered, by far, the most responsible actors, above the governments and the food industry.

Implication for UNICEF: This parental responsibility is deeply rooted in the individual blame narrative. However, we can leverage this parental element as part of the UNICEF voice by focusing on the need to help parents protect their children's rights to nutritious food and healthy futures. Our communication should recognize and address the fact that it is hard for parents to raise children in unhealthy and unfair food environments that don't offer healthy options. We should also tap into messaging that points to junk food companies trying to influence their children (even when parents are not around) to consume products that will damage their physical and mental health. Parents can be a powerful voice in demanding healthier options from the food industry and advocating for their children to be protected from harmful marketing techniques.

10. There are no huge standout differences in the perceptions of citizens who are more worried, less worried, or neutral regarding childhood overweight and obesity. Importantly, they all agree that the primary cause of childhood overweight and obesity is the lack of physical activity and that parents are ultimately responsible.

Implication for UNICEF: While there is clearly a lot of work to do in changing the narrative, this finding is important because it shows that our global framing of the issue is broad enough to address varying public perceptions about childhood overweight and obesity. At this point in UNICEF's global advocacy strategy, we do not need to worry about curating different messages for different sections of the public with varying levels of apathy towards the issue. We just need different messaging for the public, policymakers, and the food industry.

2

Core Tenets

2 Core Tenets

Our overall voice must be rooted in values-based and gain-framed messaging. Positive advocacy can cut through the noise of food industry tactics by creating persuasive messaging that motivates public action for healthy public policy. We should gear our messaging around values that everyone can get behind, and around how children and the public will benefit and gain from our proposed solutions.

We want to shift away from the narrative that *“childhood obesity is an unsolvable crisis that is the individual responsibility of parents and children”* towards the narrative that ***“Unhealthy and unfair food environments violate our children’s rights to nutritious food and healthy futures. We have the power to change this through simple policy solutions that guarantee that all children, no matter where they live, have fair access to nutritious and healthy foods that support their physical and mental well-being.”***

To do so, we have drawn on previously established behaviour change communication research for the purpose of this document.²³

QUICK REFERENCE

Ten Guiding Principles

First, here are 10 guiding principles for shaping UNICEF’s voice and framing our messaging:

1. **Externalize** the problem by focusing on the external barriers people face.
2. **Use values** (not facts), frame issues around altruistic values like honesty, equality and justice.
3. **Highlight how everyone benefits:** solutions should always provide people with more or better options, rather than banning or reducing, which limits choices.
4. **Lead with children’s health** and how we can improve it.
5. **Appeal to a sense of fairness** – the desire to meet all children’s needs and protect their rights, no matter where they live.
6. **Frame unhealthy junk food** as full of cheap ingredients intended to boost profits at the expense of children’s health.
7. **Emphasize that positive change** is not only needed but is possible.
8. **Bring messages to life** with real world child centred stories.
9. **Avoid the term ‘obesity’ as much as possible** while using less stigmatizing language such as “above a healthy weight”
10. **Harness the power of repetition** to change hearts and minds.



²Healthy persuasion: A message guide for health promotion practitioners 2020 update. VicHealth

³Communicating about Obesity: A FrameWorks Strategic Report. The Frameworks Institute; Changing the Childhood Obesity Conversation to Improve Children’s Health. The Frameworks Institute

EFFECTIVE MESSAGING

Second, how to create effective messaging to amplify our voice:

1. DESCRIBE

An attractive and relatable vision for children's nutrition and health.

2. IDENTIFY

An external barrier that undermines people's efforts to achieve this vision.

3. FRAME

The required actions as positive, achievable and simple solutions that will generate a better future for parents and their children.

4. LISTEN

To young people and lift their voices in all communication. There is no stronger advocate for change than young people with lived experience.

AVOID PERPETUATING STIGMA

*Finally, **pay close attention** to ensure that language and accompanying visuals don't perpetuate stigma:*

Avoid using stigmatizing or demeaning photos/videos/graphics of people living with overweight and obesity. Images have a lot of power and, as UNICEF, we need to ensure we do not perpetuate stigma. Avoid photos/videos/graphics that depict children who are living with overweight or obesity eating, looking depressed, or where they have no heads or topless torsos. Instead, use photos that are positive and happy, and promote the idea that these children are like any others, and can be cheerful, active and live 'normal' lives.

Try to show visuals of the unhealthy food environments that children grow up in to illustrate the issue. This can include retail settings packed with unhealthy foods, or it could be children surrounded by unhealthy food marketing.

If you must use the terms overweight and obesity, adopt person-first language.

This emphasizes that obesity is a condition rather than a characteristic of a child and avoids stigmatization. For example, use descriptions "a child with obesity" and not "an obese child"

Framing matters. Avoid language that directly or indirectly puts the blame or full responsibility on parents (e.g., avoid focusing on tips to help parents make healthy choices). Instead, place emphasis on the fact that parents want the best for their children and focus on the interventions and solutions needed to address the underlying drivers of childhood overweight and obesity. Empower parents by providing practical resources and tips. Focus on increasing people's options, not on their choices.

3

Framing Key Advocacy Themes



KEY ADVOCACY THEME 1

Failing Food Systems

Setting the Context

Nutritious food isn't always affordable or available. And even when it is, it may not be desirable when pitted against promotions for junk food. Without easy access to nutritious food, parents and children are steered towards unhealthy options that place children at risk of developing malnutrition in any of its forms. Every parent and child deserves the opportunity to access healthy and nutritious food – and solutions exist. With the right package of policies, families can actually access and afford the nutritious diets they know will help their children thrive.

HIGHLIGHT

Becky's take on failing food systems

Becky, an 18-year-old food activist with the United Kingdom-based charity Bite Back 2030, shares her experience campaigning to improve child health and to reform a food system that is rigged against young people.

You can read her [Voices of Youth](#) blog here.



Failing Food Systems

HOW TO FRAME THIS THEME?

Primary audiences

GENERAL PUBLIC

Our food system is unfair – and it’s failing our children. Millions of children can’t access the healthy options they need to support the nutrition they need for good physical growth and mental well-being. Every child deserves access to local, nutritious and affordable food to fuel a bright future. Call on your governments to address this crisis and protect the public interest by supporting families through policies that provide every child with the nutrition they need to grow and thrive.

POLICYMAKERS

Governments are responsible for protecting children’s right to adequate nutrition and healthy futures. UNICEF is calling on governments to implement policies that ensure nutritious diets are affordable, accessible, and appealing to all children, no matter where they live.

Secondary audience

PRIVATE SECTOR

Children, adolescents, parents and families around the world are demanding nutritious and affordable food and drinks that are good for both people and our planet – and governments are listening. Food companies have the opportunity to be part of the solution by reducing unhealthy options and expanding the market for healthier, more sustainable food.

Other options

General Public

- Healthy food is a part of many cultures around the world and we should cherish and protect it. Don’t let junk food companies replace our nutritious, traditional foods with empty calories and ultra-processed products that contribute to ill health.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us the importance of taking care of our health, and how good nutrition is essential. However, countless children don’t have access to nutritious food to grow and thrive, which puts their health at great risk. Work with us to ensure every child has access to healthy food for a healthy future.
- What children eat is determined by their daily environments. We need to support children to eat well with policies and programmes that improve access to healthy options and limit

exposure to junk food. All children deserve nutritious and affordable food to fuel a bright future.

Policymakers

- Access to nutritious food and improving the quality of children’s diets are core components of the Sustainable Development Agenda. UNICEF is calling on governments to implement policies and regulations that guarantee that nutritious diets are affordable, accessible and appealing to all children, no matter where they live.
- UNICEF is calling on governments to develop policies that protect fresh, local foods and end the promotion of harmful products that damage children’s health. We need action today to rebalance our food system in favour of good nutrition and healthy diets.

- Give our children and young people better options. Take action to restrict the sale of junk food in schools and its marketing to children, and offer healthy meals so that every child has access to nutritious food.

Private Sector

- Every child deserves access to nutritious food. Be a champion in offering nutritious foods that are accessible and affordable for everyone and put a stop once and for all to the promotion of unhealthy ultra-processed products.



KEY ADVOCACY THEME 2
Misleading Labels

Setting the Context

It's hard to stay healthy when you don't know what you're putting in your body. Labels like "no added sugar," "high in fibre," and "contains fruit" mislead children and parents into thinking junk food is healthy, when it actually contains ingredients that contribute to long-term health problems. We need policies that mandate easy-to-understand front-of-pack nutrition labels with clear and accurate information on what food contains. This will empower everyone to live their healthiest life.

HIGHLIGHT

Communications to support front of package food labels in Mexico

UNICEF produced and disseminated [videos](#), messages, infographics and other products to support the implementation of Mexico's new front-of-pack nutrition labelling system. These creative materials and accompanying campaigns were developed with participation of children, centring the voice of children to target other young people and the general public.

To learn more about successful front-of-pack labelling systems around the world, have a look at [UNICEF's policy brief](#) in addition to [UNICEF's call to action video](#).



Misleading Labels

HOW TO FRAME THIS THEME?

Primary audiences

GENERAL PUBLIC

Misleading and confusing food labels allow companies to disguise their junk food as healthy. This isn't fair to you or your children. Call on your government officials to implement accurate, simple and mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labels to help children and parents find the healthiest option.

POLICYMAKERS

Governments have a responsibility to protect every child's right to a nutritious healthy diet. Introduce mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labels to warn people about harmful ingredients, keep caregivers informed, and protect children and their families from misleading food claims.

Secondary audience

PRIVATE SECTOR

Disguising junk food as healthy purposefully misleads families and children. Take action today to do the right thing. We call on companies to immediately stop using misleading food labels to sell their unhealthy products.

Other options

General Public

- Junk food companies use labels like "no added sugar," "high in fibre," and "contains fruit" to disguise junk food as healthy while hiding harmful ingredients in the fine print on the back of the package. This isn't fair. Call on governments to implement accurate, transparent front-of-pack nutrition labels to help children and parents find the healthiest option.
- Clear and easy labelling on the front of packaged food and drinks will help you find the best option for you and your family. Join UNICEF in calling on governments to implement transparent front-of-pack nutrition labels today.
- Finding healthy food can be confusing when you're faced with tons of unhealthy options. Clear and easy-to-understand labelling can help you find the best and healthiest option for you. Call on governments to implement

accurate, transparent front-of-pack nutrition labels so you can find the most nutritious option.

- Not all food that is marketed as "healthy" is good for you. For example, a cereal could be marketed as nutritious and high in fibre, when it actually contains high levels of sugar, salts or fats. Encourage your government to implement front-of-pack nutrition labels so you can find the best option for you and your family.

Policymakers

- Children and caregivers have a right to be warned about the harmful ingredients in junk food. Implement mandatory front-of-pack labels to protect people from misleading food claims.
- Junk food companies are producing cheap, tasty and appealing foods that cause malnutrition and other

diet-related diseases. They also use misleading labels to convince the public that these foods are healthy. This needs to stop. We need governments to implement accurate, transparent front-of-pack nutrition labels so you can find healthy options for your family.

Private Sector

- Food can taste great without wreaking havoc on children's health. Remove the harmful, cheap ingredients used in your products that damage our children's health. Using high-quality, healthy ingredients to produce minimally processed food is the best contribution that you can make.
- Families don't want to be misled with confusing labels on your products. They want simple and transparent front-of-pack labelling that helps them find the healthiest products quicker.



KEY ADVOCACY THEME 3

Harmful Marketing to Children

Setting the Context

Children are highly vulnerable to food marketing. They struggle to understand that advertisements are biased and trying to sell them something. They also have yet to develop the emotional and mental tools to resist the intent of food marketing. Junk food companies take advantage of this by using eye-catching advertisements to keep their products at the forefront of every child's mind, such as around schools, in grocery stores and on social media. Constant exposure to unhealthy food marketing early in life affects lifelong preferences and consumption patterns, putting children at a higher risk of developing chronic health problems. Children have the right to protection from unhealthy food marketing. They must be protected by policies that restrict and regulate the marketing of these damaging products.

HIGHLIGHT

The shocking effects of junk food advertising on young people

Do we really choose what we eat? Eight young people turned up to a restaurant for what they believed was the end of a social experiment. Little did they know, it was really the end of it. The charity Bite Back 2030 used this shocking [video](#) to highlight the harmful effects of marketing to children.



Bite Back 2030 also produced a short film, *Mascots Anonymous*, about junk food companies that used cute and friendly cartoon characters to mislead children into eating unhealthy food. It's a story about what happens when these mascots come to terms with the damage they've done to children's health.

To learn more about successful stories of how governments are restricting the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children from around the world, have a look at [UNICEF's policy brief](#) in addition to [UNICEF's call to action video](#).

Harmful Marketing to Children

HOW TO FRAME THIS THEME?

Primary audiences

GENERAL PUBLIC

Junk food companies take advantage of our children by using non-stop, eye-catching marketing to keep their products at the forefront of every child's mind. Children are exposed to junk food marketing as they go online, walk to school, or stand in the grocery store checkout line. This isn't okay. Children have the right to be free from commercial exploitation and to not be bombarded with unhealthy food marketing. Support us in calling for governments to implement laws that protect children from harmful food marketing.

POLICYMAKERS

The harmful marketing of junk food violates numerous rights enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, from their right to health and adequate nutrition through to the right to privacy. Governments have a legal obligation to ensure children's best interests in all policies. We must stop junk food companies from violating these rights by keeping them out of the policy process and putting children first.

Secondary audience

PRIVATE SECTOR

The marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children violates a child's right to adequate nutrition and a healthy future. Don't be liable for widespread malnutrition and diet-related disease. Stop bombarding children with junk food marketing.

Other options

General Public

- We know that junk food is bad for our kids' health, so why is it okay for companies to push their products on them? Junk food contains ingredients that put children at risk of developing chronic illnesses. Call on governments to ban junk food marketing to children.
- Junk food companies aggressively target children with marketing that will affect their food preferences for life. Take action and protect your children by encouraging governments to ban junk food advertising to children.
- Junk food companies carefully study child psychology and use celebrities, bright colours, fun characters, and gifts to trick children into wanting their products. This isn't fair. Children have a right not to be lured into

unhealthy food preferences. Encourage governments to ban junk food marketing to children.

Policymakers

- Children should not be the target of harmful marketing that promotes junk food. You can protect them by introducing laws that regulate the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages high in fat, sugar, and salt, across all media and settings. Sanction junk food companies that fail to follow these regulations so that every childhood is free from junk food marketing.
- Junk food companies use celebrities, bright colours, fun characters, and gifts to peddle junk food to children. This undermines parents' efforts to

provide their children with healthy diets by negatively impacting children's food preferences. Support parents and children by implementing policies that protect them from harmful food marketing. Every child deserves the opportunity to develop a love for healthy, nutritious food.

Private Sector

- Children have the right to adequate nutrition and to make their own decisions about food without corporate influence. Marketing junk food to children violates this right by negatively impacting children's long-term food preferences, nutrition, and health. Stop marketing junk food to children and give them a chance at a healthy life.



KEY ADVOCACY THEME 4

Sugary Drinks Tax

Setting the Context

Sugary drinks contain huge amounts of empty calories and contribute to chronic illnesses and malnutrition. Their attractive packaging, low prices, and easy accessibility means that many families opt for sugary drinks instead of healthier alternatives. Let's flip the script. We need policies that make sugary drinks less appealing and send a strong signal to parents to cut them from children's diets. Every parent deserves the opportunity to give their children a healthy, nutritious diet.

HIGHLIGHT

Mexico's fight for the sugary drink tax

In Mexico, Type 2 diabetes is the leading cause of mortality. This is a crisis fuelled by the reality that sugary drinks are more accessible than clean drinking water across the country. *El Susto* is an investigative documentary behind Mexico's fight for the sugary drink tax.

To learn more about successful stories of governments that have implemented taxes on sugary drinks and reap the tax revenue benefits, have a look at [UNICEF's policy brief](#) in addition to [UNICEF's call to action video](#).



Sugary Drinks Tax

HOW TO FRAME THIS THEME?

Primary audiences

GENERAL PUBLIC

A single sugary drink – like soda, bubble tea, or chocolate milk – can contain more than double the daily maximum sugar intake for kids. These drinks harm our children’s nutrition, health and development, but their low prices, attractive marketing, and easy accessibility make them difficult to avoid. Call on your governments to set their priorities straight and make healthier drink alternatives the easier and more attractive option.

POLICYMAKERS

Governments should implement and enforce a tax on all sugar-sweetened beverages, including soda, juice drinks, chocolate milks, energy drinks, bubble teas and frappes). Taxes work to reduce sugary drink consumption, and therefore health care costs, providing governments with important revenue to fund nutrition and health-related programmes.

Secondary audience

PRIVATE SECTOR

Those drinks you are filling with dangerous amounts of added sugar and artificial sweeteners cause serious health harm to children around the world. Remove all added sugar and harmful ingredients from your products to support a healthy future for every child.

Other options

General Public

- Sugary drinks contain way too much sugar and other harmful ingredients. Opt for healthier beverages like water or other non-sweetened beverages and limit consumption of sugary drinks.

Policymakers

- Sugary drinks are easier to access than water, even though they are fuelling diet-related illnesses. Governments need to take action so families have easy access to free, safe water.

Private Sector

- Sugary drinks contain more sugar than they need to. Reduce the amount of sugar and other harmful ingredients used in your products and support a healthy future for every child.



KEY ADVOCACY THEME 5

Junk Food Villains

Setting the Context

Junk food companies are failing children. From pervasive junk food marketing to price tactics that make unhealthy options more attractive and affordable, junk food companies profit from conditions that put children at risk of malnutrition. This doesn't have to be the case. Governments can and should implement policies that hold junk food companies accountable so every child has access to a nutritious diet for a healthy future.

HIGHLIGHT

Taking a strong stance against an industry

There is substantial historical precedent for a United Nations agency to take a strong stance against an industry whose practices are damaging to children's health, such as the junk food industry. The World Health Organization (WHO) set the groundwork for this type of direct advocacy in its public battle with the tobacco industry. Using strong and firm terminology such as "manipulation" or "ploys," [WHO publicly exposed](#) the tobacco industry's playbook. The agency even charged that the tobacco industry "preyed on children and adolescents, employing advertising tactics and targeting them directly with a new portfolio of products that threaten their health." WHO framed its global messaging around direct attacks against the tobacco industry, including its powerful World No Tobacco Day 2020 #TobaccoExposed campaign.



As the evidence mounts that the junk food industry is using the tobacco industry's playbook to promote the consumption of ultra-processed unhealthy food and beverages, the calls to take a stronger stance against them will also grow.

Junk Food Villains

HOW TO FRAME THIS THEME?

Primary audiences

GENERAL PUBLIC

Caregivers are doing their best to provide children with nutritious food, but these efforts are being undermined by junk food companies. From pervasive junk food marketing to making healthy options inaccessible and unaffordable, these companies profit from conditions that put children at risk of malnutrition and diet-related diseases. This is wrong. Governments should implement policies that hold junk food companies accountable so every child has access to a nutritious diet and a healthy future.

POLICYMAKERS

Junk food companies continue to profit from harmful, unhealthy foods that cause malnutrition and other diet-related diseases. Governments need to stop junk food companies from prioritizing corporate wealth over children's health. Regulate junk food companies and protect every child's right to nutritious food for a healthy future.

Secondary audience

PRIVATE SECTOR

Consumer trends are changing. Caregivers are demanding healthy food for themselves and their children. Junk food companies need to start respecting children's right to adequate nutrition and healthy futures. Listen to consumers and provide the healthy, affordable and sustainable products everyone wants – or your competitors will.

Other options

General Public

- Not everyone can access or afford healthy foods. Without access to nutritious food, parents are forced to decide between unhealthy options that place their children at risk of developing malnutrition. Every parent deserves the opportunity to provide their children with healthy, nutritious food. Encourage governments to increase access to healthy food so every child has the opportunity to thrive.
- Junk food companies are using harmful ingredients that damage our human and environmental health by producing huge amounts of packaging and food waste, water contamination, and carbon emissions. Call for government regulations of junk food companies to ensure a healthy future for people and the planet.
- Parents need to be vigilant. Junk food companies are trying to infiltrate

communities to increase brand awareness and consumer loyalty to their unhealthy products. Don't let this happen. Encourage your government to regulate junk food companies/marketing so we can keep our communities healthy.

Policymakers

- Governments need to recognize the public health threat that junk food companies pose. Junk food companies are locked into a profit-driven cycle of harmful practices. They use problematic marketing techniques to build credit in sports and other public activities while selling food that damages our health. Impose strict regulations on junk food companies to break the cycle and improve public health and wellness.
- Governments have a responsibility to maintain public health, which includes nutrition. Stop letting junk

food companies flood the market with unhealthy food options. Regulate junk food companies to ensure families can raise their children to be healthy.

- When designing policies that protect every child's right to nutritious food for a healthy future, governments must protect the policy process from industry interference. To avoid conflict of interest and to ensure child-first policies are designed and implemented, the private sector cannot have a seat at the table.

Private Sector

- Listen to the consumers of today and tomorrow. It's not too late for junk food companies to hear what parents and children really want: more nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable food.