

A young child with dark hair in two pigtails, one with an orange tie and one with a pink tie, is smiling and holding a white ceramic bowl with both hands. The bowl has a faint floral pattern. The child is wearing a white sleeveless top with a colorful floral pattern. The background is a dark blue, ornate, patterned fabric.

unicef   
for every child

# **ENGAGING WITH THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY**

UNICEF Programme Guidance

Executive Summary

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**For UNICEF, the food systems transformation agenda called for by the United Nations Secretary General is a child rights agenda.**

With child rights advocates globally and locally, UNICEF programmes will contribute to ensure that the policies, practices and products of the Food and Beverage (F&B) industry around the world are aligned with children's right to food, nutrition, health, information, protection, and a sustainable planet.

UNICEF programmes are principled and strategic. Therefore, *our engagement on and engagement with* the F&B industry is driven by the best interests of children. The goal is to ensure the effectiveness of our programmes by maximizing the impact of UNICEF's thought and action leadership, protecting the credibility of UNICEF as a trusted advisor to governments and partners, and preventing conflict of interest.

The F&B industry plays a central role in the production, distribution, marketing and retailing of foods that are consumed by millions of children and adolescents across the world. As such, the F&B industry is a key driver and shaper of global and national food systems, impacting children's nutrition, health and development globally and locally through its practices and products. The F&B industry can and must be a force for good, for all children, everywhere, without exception.

Currently one in three children under five years of age – or about 200 million children – is not growing well because of malnutrition; and two in three are not fed the minimum diverse diet they need to grow and develop to their full potential. Further, 380 million children and adolescents suffer from overweight and obesity – a condition that is increasingly prevalent among poorer households and countries across continents. This hurts children and hurts all of us.

The poor quality of children's diets is the most important driver of the triple burden of child malnutrition: undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight. This triple burden is increasingly concentrated in low- and middle-income countries and is largely driven by a broken food system that is failing to provide children with the nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable diets children need to grow and develop to their full potential.

The practices and products of a subset of the F&B industry whose primary business is the production, distribution, marketing and retailing of ultra-processed foods and beverages (UPF) pose particular concern. The companies producing these unhealthy, nutrient-poor UPF – rich in sugar, salt, trans-fats and food additives and preservatives – are major drivers of today's broken food system and the global epidemic of childhood overweight and obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases, including type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and poor mental health among children and adolescents. It is now widely accepted that the practices and products of the UPF industry harm children's and adolescents' lives and have become the main commercial determinant of childhood malnutrition and disease.

Evidence shows that direct partnering with the UPF industry (i.e., *working with*) and voluntary UPF industry initiatives do not translate into large-scale sustainable results in transforming food systems for children. Further, direct funding engagements with UPF industry stakeholders pose a significant reputational risk to the credibility of UNICEF programming and independence as governments' trusted advisor for policy formulation, normative guidance and programme scale-up for children and adolescents.

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Informed by ample evidence on nutrition, health and water and sanitation from within and outside of our organization, UNICEF's programme engagement on food systems transformation for children will prioritize working with national and local governments and municipalities to protect children's right to food, nutrition, health, information, protection and a livable future by creating a policy and normative environment that is aligned with the best interests of children and the planet.

UNICEF's Programme Guidance for *our engagement on* and *engagement with* the F&B industry is rights-based and recognizes States as primary duty-bearers for children's rights, including the protection and promotion of food systems and food environments that deliver nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable diets for children. This Programme Guidance applies to all UNICEF programming areas in development, fragile and humanitarian settings, without distinction, and is summarized in the following **10 parameters for engagement**.

These 10 parameters for engagement reflect principled and strategic considerations and should be applied as a minimum common standard across all UNICEF programmes:

**1. UNICEF's primary strategy to transform food systems for children is to strengthen public policy.**

This includes advocating for improved practices and products by the F&B industry and supporting national and local governments and municipalities to formulate and enforce policies, normative guidance and regulatory frameworks that address the production, distribution, marketing and retailing of foods and beverages and ensure children's access to nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable foods, everywhere.

**2. UNICEF will continue to engage with selected F&B industries on better foods for children.**

We need effective innovations to produce nutritious, safe and affordable foods for children: therapeutic foods to treat child wasting; food supplements to prevent severe undernutrition in humanitarian settings; and fortified and nutrient-rich foods for children and their families. UNICEF will prioritize engagement with local producers to generate sustainable opportunities for local economies.

**3. UNICEF will engage with F&B retailers to improve children's food environments and diets.**

Engagement to promote responsible business for children by F&B retailers can support social and behaviour change and supply-demand of healthy food. Engagements will build on solid assessments of retailers' commitment to product

placement, packaging, promotion and pricing that supports nutritious, safe and healthy F&B options for children.

**4. UNICEF will continue to advocate for the F&B industry not to be included in public policy making.**

To be effective, policy, normative and guidance processes and frameworks must be free of conflict of interest with the F&B industry. As a trusted policy and programme advisor, UNICEF will continue to discourage governments and countries from involving the F&B industry in public policy-making, norm-setting, programme guidance, programme implementation, research and evaluation processes.

**5. UNICEF will continue avoiding all partnerships with F&B industries that violate the Code.**

As per our procedure on due diligence for private sector entities, UNICEF will continue avoiding all forms of funding partnerships and/or co-branded collaborations with business and entities that manufacture and market breastmilk substitutes in ways that violate the International Code of Marketing Breast-milk Substitutes and related World Health Assembly resolutions (the Code).

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**6. UNICEF will avoid all partnerships with ultra-processed food and beverage (UPF) industries.** To preserve our thought and action leadership, align with our programming strategies, and maintain our credibility as a trusted advisor for public policy, normative guidance, and programme implementation for children, UNICEF will avoid all forms of financial and non-financial partnerships and collaborations with the UPF industry. This includes individual companies as well as associations, platforms, and front groups representing UPF industries and their interests.

**7. UNICEF will not include Code violators and UPF industries in UNICEF-led business platforms.** Producers, marketers and retailers of UPF, business entities that manufacture and market breastmilk substitutes in ways that violate the Code – including Resolution 63.14 on the marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children – and associations and front groups that defend their interests shall not be part of UNICEF-led business platforms aimed at building technical collaborations and/or cultivating fundraising opportunities.

**8. UNICEF will engage responsibly with multi-stakeholder platforms involving the F&B industry.** Engaging with multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) may be an opportunity for UNICEF to make its voice heard in potentially influential fora to advance children’s rights. UNICEF will engage strategically and responsibly with MSPs involving the F&B industry after careful evaluation of evidence that benefits outweigh costs and risks. UNICEF will avoid any association – financial or otherwise – with MSPs representing the interests of UPF industries or industries that are in violation of the Code.

**9. UNICEF will engage responsibly with the F&B industry in humanitarian response.** Private sector entities can contribute to UNICEF-led humanitarian response with expertise and resources. Their financial support to humanitarian response is considered a one-off contribution and not a partnership. UNICEF will consider financial contributions for humanitarian response by the F&B industry on a case-by-case basis if the child rights outcome that UNICEF pursues cannot be achieved through alternative means. While UNICEF will ensure accounting transparency requirements, there will be no brand asset exchange or promotional communication about the financial contribution on either side. UNICEF will not accept financial contributions from breastmilk substitutes and UPF industries for humanitarian response.

**10. UNICEF Programme Group leads UNICEF programmatic engagement with the F&B industry.** UNICEF’s work on food systems for children is led by its Nutrition Programme and so is our *engagement on* and *engagement with* the F&B industry. Guided by the UNICEF Global Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030, UNICEF favours upstream advocacy and public policy work and – as a general approach – prioritizes *engagement on* over *engagement with* the F&B industry. Engagements with the F&B industry will be evaluated taking into consideration the objective, type of industry and type of engagement.

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Three United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017, USA

Email: [nutrition@unicef.org](mailto:nutrition@unicef.org)  
Website: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

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