



**2020-2030.**

**DECADE OF ACTION ON  
INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD  
FEEDING IN ECA**



# Announcement of: Decade of Action on Infant and Young Child Feeding in ECA Region

Every child has the right to adequate nutrition. Good nutrition is also an investment in the future of children and nations. Healthy nutrition fuels children's growth, drives brain development, strengthens learning potential, enhances productivity in adulthood and paves the way to more sustainable and prosperous societies. With the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, the world is preparing to tackle the ambitious objective of ending all forms of malnutrition by 2030. In this context, the advantages of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding contribute to sustainable development as a core practice which not only affects children, but also adults and in one way or another every single development goal.

There is convincing evidence that good maternal nutrition, and optimal breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding practices are critical to ensure appropriate growth and development as well as to reduce the risk of developing non-communicable diseases (NCDs), for both mothers and children, throughout the life course.

In the region, more than 12 percent of children are still stunted<sup>1</sup> in their early years, and in several countries more than 25% of children are affected by anemia<sup>2</sup>. The region is also seeing the world's biggest rise in obesity among under-5-year-old children (80% increase in 2018 compared to 2000)<sup>3</sup>. The double burden of malnutrition in Europe and Central Asia starts during the early years of life and deteriorates during the second decade of life. After East Asia and Pacific, the rate of exclusive breast-feeding in Europe and Central Asia is the 2nd lowest globally (32%) and the rate of breastfeeding at the age of 2 is the lowest globally (28%)<sup>4</sup>. This means every year among almost 6.1 million births in the region, 4.3 million babies are deprived of optimum feeding during the first 6 months of life. Given the rapidly rising rates of obesity and over-weight, one can conclude that inadequate infant and young child feeding plays a key role in the development of NCD risk factors during the early years of life.

Aggressive marketing of breastmilk substitutes (BMS), the absence of quality and effective breastfeeding counseling services, and lack of community awareness on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding are among the main barriers world-wide. The inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children, including those which are lacking the necessary nutrients or are high in sugar and fat, threaten appropriate feeding practices and the nutritional status of children. In addition, lack of availability and access to all food groups as well as poor skills and knowledge of families, prevents children having the dietary diversity they require<sup>5</sup>. In the ECA region, over 50% of countries do not have a national law to

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<sup>1</sup> SOWC 2018

<sup>2</sup> SOFI Report for ECA 2018

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, WHO and WB Joint Estimates of Child Malnutrition, 2018

<sup>4</sup> SOWC 2018

<sup>5</sup> In May 2016, Resolution 69.9 of the World Health Assembly welcomed new Guidance from WHO on ending inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children and called on Governments to implement the Guidance recommendations. These include ensuring that Code regulations cover all breastmilk substitutes (all milks intended for children up to the age of 36 months); prohibiting cross promotion of BMS through the marketing of other products and ending conflict of interest in the health care system by the baby food industry.

regulate the marketing of BMS. Even in countries which do have a national law, it does not cover the important developments in the 2016 Resolution and guidance, and lack of systematic monitoring and enforcement mechanisms as well as weak practical and costed programming results in poor performance of IYCF in the region<sup>6</sup>.

The Seventy-First World Health Assembly (in May 2018), adopted a resolution to support appropriate infant and young child feeding. The resolution urges Member States to increase investment to protect and promote breastfeeding, reinvigorate the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, strengthen measures to give effect to the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, promote timely and adequate complementary feeding, end inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children, ensure appropriate child feeding during emergencies and more.

Since 1991, the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) has helped to motivate facilities providing maternity and newborn services worldwide to better support breastfeeding. However, in the Europe and Central Asia Region only 36% of infants are born in BFHI facilities. Countries have found it difficult to sustain a vertical BFHI program, with implementation often relying on specific individual and external resources. UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) published updated implementation guidance in 2018 which emphasizes coverage and sustainability.

In addition, aggressive marketing of ready to use complementary food for babies, the absence of quality and effective Infant and Young Child Feeding counseling services, and lack of community awareness has hampered the feeding of children from 6-24 months of age. The inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children, including those which are lacking the necessary nutrients or are high in sugar, salt and unhealthy fat, threatens appropriate feeding practices and can result in rapidly growing child obesity in the region. In addition, lack of availability and access to all food groups as well as families poor skills and knowledge, prevents children having the dietary adequacy and diversity they require.

Although 69% of children in the region are experiencing timely introduction of complementary foods, only 28% of them are enjoying a minimum acceptable diet from 6-23 months of age, as the quality of these complementary foods is usually inadequate to address the nutritional needs of infants and young children<sup>7</sup>.

Given the concerning situation of IYCF and especially breastfeeding in the region (one of the poorest globally), and the massive wave of child obesity, to achieve the SDGs on nutrition and other global commitments on nutrition, it is critical to accelerate our efforts to improve the feeding of Infants and Young Children in our region in the remaining 10 years to SDG target for 2030.

Therefore the 2020-2030 is a Decade to Accelerate Actions on Infant and Young Child Feeding in our region.

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<sup>6</sup> Global Dashboard on Breastfeeding

<sup>7</sup> SOWC 2018

This regional campaign, demands **four major commitments**;

- 1- Commitment number 1:** Putting in place national legislations and / or enforce the existing legislations on the Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes
- 2- Commitment 2:** Scaling up the quality (upgraded) and coverage of BFHI as a standing component of quality improvement programs
- 3- Country Commitment 3:** Upgrading the complementary feeding standards and enhancing the coverage and quality of nutrition counselling
- 4- Commitment 4:** Enhancing the metrics for IYCF programming and applying a multi-system approach in achieving the above three commitments, involving health systems, food systems, WASH systems, Social protection systems and community systems

### How does it work for countries?

Starting from before, during and after the Serbia conference in July 2019, initial country commitments and pledges have been developed. Following the country level consultations and review, the commitments will be finalized and approved by the countries for a period of 5 years.

Commitments must be SMART - specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound – to help all stakeholders understand what actions is intended and it also helps the tracking of the progress.

The commitments must be in alignment with the global commitment (e.g. Decade of Action on Nutrition) and correspond to policy development processes, delivery mechanisms or financial investments. These commitments can be financial or non-financial and should reflect national priorities and respond to any given country's situation.

A regional compilation of harmonized commitments will be developed which will be considered as a collective commitment of ECA on IYCF for 2020-2030 under the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.

A regional progress monitoring tool and mechanism will be established to monitor the annual progress of the Decade of Action on IYCF in ECA.

Governments are expected to provide information annually to allow tracking of progress on their implementation and to document achievements and successes.

Countries will be provided with context specific technical support, skills and policy capacity development where needed, and policy advocacy and potential support with resource mobilization.