

September 2019

Intersectoral action: the arts, health and well-being

Synergy between sectors: supporting health through the arts

Summary

The Health 2020 policy framework has been adopted by all Member States of the WHO European Region to address Europe's great social and health challenges, calling upon the health sector to reach out to and work with all the various sectors and parties in the continuing work of improving people's health and well-being.

A recently published WHO Health Evidence Network synthesis report (The role of the arts in improving health and well-being in the WHO European Region) demonstrates how arts interventions can help improve health and well-being, contribute to the prevention of a variety of mental and physical illnesses and support in the treatment

or management of a range of acute and chronic conditions arising across the life-course. As such, arts interventions are often low-risk, highly cost-effective, integrated and holistic treatment options for complex health challenges to which there are no current solutions.

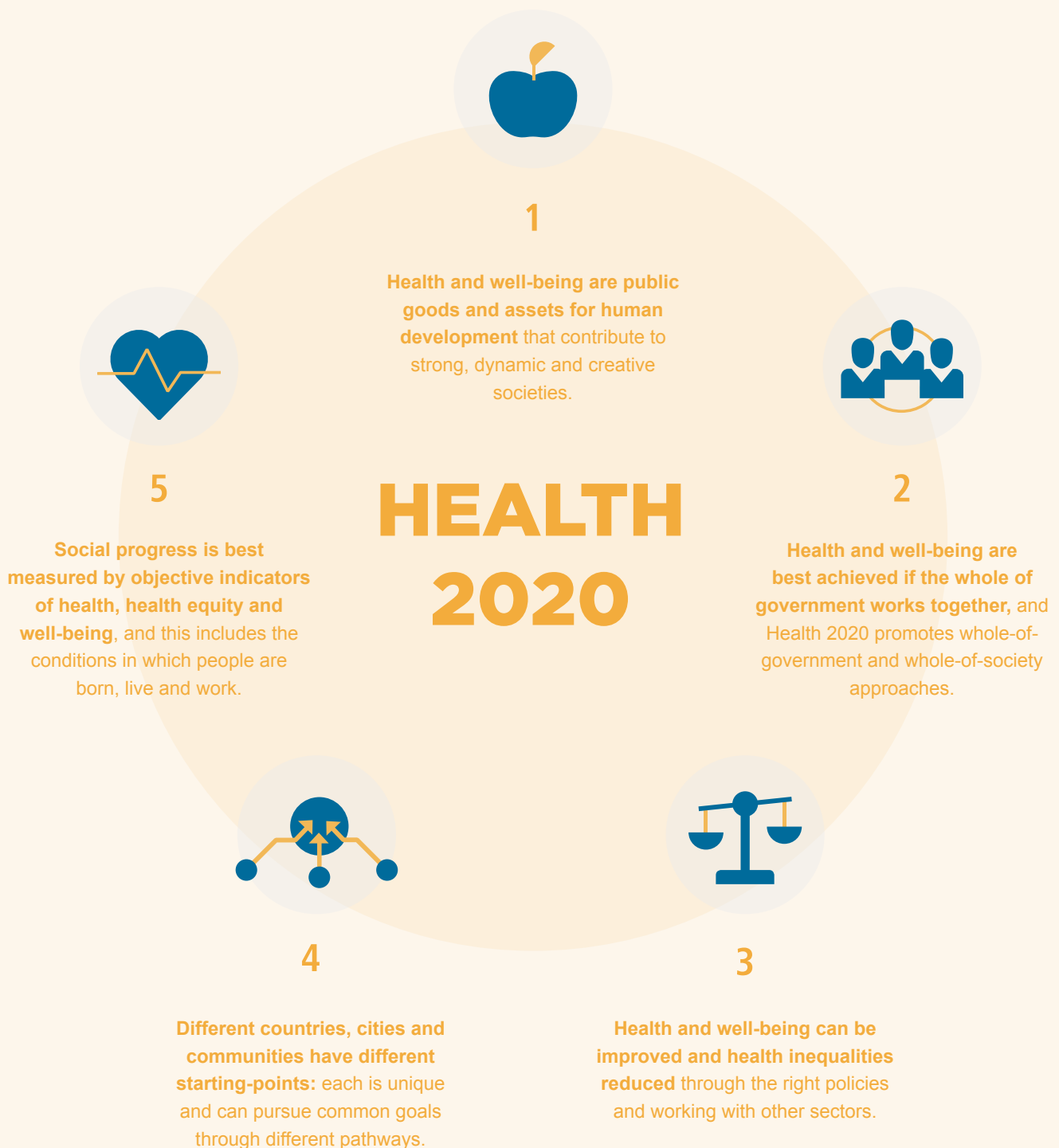
Nevertheless, the positive potential impact arts interventions can have on the health and well-being of individuals and communities is not being fully realized, because opportunities for collaboration between the arts and health sectors are not being properly developed. This publication summarizes the evidence for the multiple ways in which it has been demonstrated that arts

programmes can benefit the health agenda, from reducing social inequalities to increasing health equity and from providing better training for health professionals to improving resilience and coping among informal caregivers.

Stronger pathways between the arts, health and social care can provide creative solutions to help to achieve the Health 2020 targets and the Sustainable Development Goals. Further, more collaboration between sectors can also enrich cultural capital by ensuring that everyone has equitable access to the arts in community and health-care settings across the Region.

Key messages

The goal of Health 2020 is to significantly improve the health and well-being of populations, reduce health inequalities, strengthen public health and ensure people-centred health systems that are universal, equitable, sustainable and of high quality.





Strengthening the link between health and the arts

In 2012, all 53 countries in the European Region adopted Health 2020, the new common European health policy framework, and committed themselves to developing integrative policies that engage with all sectors in addressing the social and economic determinants of health and well-being.

A recent WHO Health Evidence Network synthesis report summarizes an extensive evidence base showing how the arts sector plays an important role in promoting good health, preventing numerous mental and physical health challenges and supporting the management and treatment of acute and chronic conditions.

Engagement with the arts can help to prevent ill health, including enhancing well-being and mental health and reducing the risk of age-related mental and physical decline. The arts can also help people experiencing mild, moderate and severe mental illness and trauma and abuse in managing and recovering from their symptoms. For people with acute conditions, access to the arts in hospital and in the community can help to improve experience and outcomes across emergency care and in rehabilitation. For people with chronic conditions, such as diseases of the nervous system, the arts support mental health, physical functioning and social and emotional well-being. The

arts also provide valuable social and emotional support in palliative care and bereavement.

Overall, the arts help to provide holistic and integrated patient-centred care. They are non-invasive and low-risk options within health care, they can help to address complex challenges for which there are no current health-care solutions and they can draw on existing assets or resources and thereby be cost effective. Working together, provision of and access to the arts can be ensured across the life-course both in the community and in health-care settings to help promote good health and well-being.

Health 2020: a framework for action

The goal of Health 2020 is to significantly improve the health and well-being of populations, reduce health inequalities, strengthen public health and ensure people-centred health systems that are universal, equitable, sustainable and of high quality.

All Member States of the WHO European Region have agreed to monitor progress against six common targets:

1. **Reduce premature mortality in the European Region by 2020**
2. **Increase life expectancy in the European Region**
3. **Reduce health inequalities in the European Region**
4. **Enhance the well-being of the European Region population**
5. **Ensure universal health coverage and the right to the highest attainable level of health**
6. **Set national goals and targets related to health in Member States**

What makes societies prosper and flourish can also make people healthy: policies that recognize this have more impact.

Building awareness and capacity to make health objectives part of society's overall socioeconomic and human development is an essential task. All policy fields, including health, need to reform their ways of working and employ new forms and approaches to policy. This applies to the global, national and local levels.

Synergy between sectors: the arts as a tool to improve health and well-being

Strengthening the link between health and the arts

The arts, including performing arts, visual arts, design and crafts, digital and electronic arts, literature, cultural activities and events, have a crucial role to play in ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all throughout the life-course. Engagement with the arts can help to address social determinants of health, such as by developing social cohesion, reducing loneliness and social isolation and building individual and group identity. Arts programmes have been shown to reduce conflict by promoting intercultural understanding and promoting tolerance and cooperation across different groups. Arts programmes can also help to reduce both social inequalities and increase equity in health by developing skills, building capacity and promoting social inclusion.

The arts can also help to give every child the best start in life by enhancing mother–infant bonding and speech and language acquisition, supporting behavioural adjustment and enhancing educational attainment. Engagement with the arts can promote healthy living. Activities such as dance provide opportunities for engaging in physical activity, improving strength and reducing obesity. Targeted arts programmes have been found to improve awareness of health, support healthier eating and

reduce risky behaviour such as using drugs and alcohol and engaging in unprotected sex.

Health communication programmes that use the arts, such as plays, murals and stories, have been found to improve health literacy in a way that is sensitive to local cultural traditions and challenges the hierarchical divisions and tensions that can exist in health communication. During epidemics and global health emergencies, such as the Ebola epidemic, arts projects have played a critical role in communicating health messages. The arts can also be used to reduce stigma surrounding health, such as through representations in media storylines, and participating in arts programmes has been found to improve empathy, ensure positive attitudes towards people with mental and physical illness and promote resilience among people with health conditions.

The arts are also effective in reaching people who are either less likely to seek health care or who experience more barriers when seeking it and therefore may have a higher risk of adverse health outcomes. This can include children in care, individuals who are homeless and individuals who may face discrimination based on their race,

ethnicity, gender or sexuality. Arts programmes have been shown to promote engagement with health services, often by reducing the stress or anxiety associated with visiting health-care settings, and to improve adherence to treatment by building self-efficacy and reducing side-effects such as pain or fatigue.

For health-care professionals, the arts can build understanding of illness and disease by representing experiences and symptoms in art forms. They can also build the skills of professionals, including their communication skills, empathy and understanding and diagnostic skills. Arts programmes in medical education and in health-care organizations have been found to improve the mental health and well-being of personnel and to reduce stress and burnout. Similar programmes in the community for informal caregivers have been found to improve resilience and coping.

Synergy between sectors: collaboration to improve health and well-being

How can the sectors work together?

Health 2020 provides a platform for such joint working between the arts and health sectors. Working together, the two sectors can provide holistic health care that draws on the arts to address complex mental and physical health needs and to support the broader promotion of health by harnessing the social, educational, behavioural and communicative potential of engagement in the arts.

KEY AREAS TO EXPLORE TOGETHER INCLUDE:

- supporting the design and implementation of high-quality arts interventions;
- promoting public awareness of the benefits for health of engaging in the arts;
- identifying and removing barriers to accessing the arts, including among older adults, people with mental ill health, people of lower socioeconomic status, members of ethnic and other minorities, people with a health condition or disability and people living in geographically isolated areas;
- facilitating the development of partnerships and partner-working between the health, social care and arts sectors;
- developing training, resources and guidelines that will support collaboration between the arts and health sectors; and
- incorporating evidence on the health benefits of the arts into relevant policy documents.

What can the arts do to make a difference to health?

- Ensure that arts provision is diverse, open and accessible, especially for people who are less likely to engage.
- Make health and well-being a part of organizational strategies, to ensure that they are given priority in the funding and commissioning of arts programmes and in new project development.
- Integrate measures of health and well-being into evaluations of interventions to build the evidence base.
- Share good practice nationally and internationally to support the scaling of effective interventions.



Collaborating to improve health and well-being

THE CHALLENGES

Designing effective arts and health interventions to address complex health problems for which there are incomplete solutions

Developing strong pathways between the arts, health and social care

Measuring how providing arts programmes affects population health

Ensuring free or affordable provision of arts resources and equal access to these resources to help improve equity in health

THE RESPONSES NEEDED

Engage with artists and arts organisations on health-care committees, steering groups and task forces to identify opportunities for collaboration. Collaborate across arts sectors and health sectors to design, test and deliver arts interventions to address complex health challenges. Ensure that arts organizations have the capacity and training to deliver such interventions

Undertake joint work across sectors to identify opportunities for referring individuals to arts activities and promoting arts engagement, especially where health and social care resources are scarce. Identify and address barriers to partnership working across sectors

Improve the monitoring and surveillance of patterns of arts engagement, include measures of arts engagement within cohort studies and relevant routinely collected data and routinely analyse population-level data on implications for health

Support the work of arts sectors internationally in funding arts and cultural institutions and organizations. Develop policies and strategies that support organizations in reaching diverse audiences across communities, schools and health-care settings

What can health do to make a difference to the arts?

- Explore opportunities for co-commissioning programmes that benefit both the arts and the health sector.
- Provide clinical insight into the impact of arts programmes within health by collaborating on programme evaluations.
- Incorporate the arts into the training of health professionals, both for the well-being and skills development of personnel and to raise awareness of the value of the arts within health.
- Provide training and development opportunities to support the development of artists, including building knowledge and skills on working with specific health populations.

United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a political mandate and transformative call for action

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all 193 Member States of the United Nations at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015 in New York. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. They build on the successes of the

Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities. The Goals are interconnected and require multisectoral and intersectoral action – the key to success for any one goal will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another.

Health 2020

The Health 2020 policy framework has a political mandate. It has been adopted by all WHO European Region Member States and can be adapted to the different settings and realities that make up the Region. It describes how health and well-being can be advanced, sustained and measured through action that creates social cohesion, security, a good work–life balance, good health and good education. It calls upon the health sector to reach out to the many different actors within and outside government and provides inspiration and direction on addressing the complex health challenges of the 21st century. The framework confirms values, is based on evidence and identifies strategic directions and essential actions. It builds on the experiences

gained through previous Health for All policies and guides the actions of both Member States and the Regional Office.

Health 2020, the European policy framework for health and well-being, fully aligns with the 2030 Agenda. Both aim to improve health and well-being for all at all ages through whole-of-government, whole-of-society and health-in-all-policies approaches. Both tackle the social, economic, cultural and environmental determinants of health. The 2030 Agenda offers new momentum for implementing Health 2020. It presents a unique opportunity to renew national commitments to advancing health and well-being in the WHO European Region.

Reducing health inequalities: to reduce health inequalities, the following should be addressed.

LIFE-COURSE STAGE

- Social protection for women, mothers to be and young families
- Universal, high-quality and affordable early-years education and care system
- Eradication of unsafe work and access to employment and high-quality work
- Coherent and effective intersectoral action to tackle inequalities at older ages

WIDER SOCIETY

- Improved social protection, according to need
- Co-creation and partnership with those targeted, civil society and civic partners
- Action to reduce social exclusion
- A gender equity approach

BROADER CONTEXT

- Promoting equity through tax and transfer payments
- Long-term planning through links with other policies

SYSTEMS

- Greater coherence across sectors
- Comprehensive responses
- Regular reporting and public scrutiny

Transformative governance for action between health and the arts

The adoption of the Health 2020 health policy framework for the WHO European Region in 2012 by all Member States, with governance for health as a twin strategic objective alongside improved health equity, marked an invigorated strategic approach in the European Region to strengthen governance for health and intersectoral action. This provides an excellent foundation for operationalizing and implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, which calls for good governance, new models of partnership and scaling up of intersectoral work as the means to achieve global, regional and national goals and targets, and to meet today's complex global challenges.

Moving towards models of governance that deliver through their design health, equity

and well-being is an example of the transformative response called for by the 2030 Agenda. Involving, managing, coordinating, developing accountability and coherence, and supporting the implementation of action between diverse actors across all levels of government and beyond are necessary to achieve global, regional and national goals and targets and to effectively address today's complex global challenges.

The transformative approach to improved governance is facilitated through whole-systems approaches at each individual level or node within a system (whole of government, whole of society, whole of city and whole of school) that engage all levels of governance within a system, from the international through the national and the regional to the local.

SDGs for action between the arts and health



Capacity for intersectoral governance for health and well-being depends on three key factors:

1. The right to health, and sector mandates for multisectoral and intersectoral action for health and well-being
2. Resourcing and organization for multisectoral and intersectoral action for health and well-being; and
3. The capacity of institutions and individuals for designing, implementing and delivering multisectoral and intersectoral action for health and well-being.

Evidence base

Arts engagement can improve social cohesion, capital and resilience within communities (Sustainable Development Goal target 1.5). In particular, in least developed countries, the arts have been shown to improve cooperation and help to reduce social inequalities through skills development and providing opportunities for social mobility, especially at sensitive periods in the life-course, helping to reduce health-related chains of risk (Sustainable Development Goal target 1.a).

Engagement with the arts helps to reduce the risk of developing mental illness and noncommunicable disease and promotes mental health and well-being among those with and without physical illness (Sustainable Development Goal target 3.4). Arts engagement is also associated with healthier behaviours and lower risk-taking behaviour, including less substance use (Sustainable Development Goal target 3.5). The arts have also been effectively

mobilized during epidemics and more widely to improve health communication (Sustainable Development Goal target 3.3).

The arts play a vital role in education. Access to the arts in early years has been shown to improve speech and language development and school readiness (Sustainable Development Goal target 4.2). Amongst children in primary and secondary education, regular arts engagement is linked with lower risk of behavioural problems that could affect school attendance (Sustainable Development Goal target 4.1). The arts also improve educational attainment and skills development, supporting employability (Sustainable Development Goal targets 4.4 and 8.6), while the creative industries and cultural tourism provide wide-ranging employment and entrepreneurship opportunities and significant economic returns for countries within the WHO European Region (Sustainable Development Goal targets 8.3, 8.4 and 8.9).

The arts engage diverse groups within society, helping to engage these groups with health services, and also provide a voice to challenge stigma and discrimination, thereby supporting goals to reduce inequalities within society, whether across gender, age, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status (Sustainable Development Goal targets 5.1 and 10.2). Overall, the arts have been shown to reduce conflict and to build inclusive, resilient and salutogenic cities and settlements (Sustainable Development Goal targets 11.3 and 16.6), and the arts sector is playing a major role in safeguarding the world's cultural heritage (Sustainable Development Goal target 11.4) and promoting access and engagement with culture (Sustainable Development Goal target 11.7).

For further information, see [the Concept note: assessment tool for governance for health and well-being](#).

Sustainable Development Goal targets for action between the arts and health

GOAL

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL TARGET



Sustainable Development Goal 1:

End poverty in all its forms everywhere

1.5 By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters

1.a Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions



Sustainable Development Goal 3:

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

3.3 By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, waterborne diseases and other communicable diseases

3.4 By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being

3.5 Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol



Sustainable Development Goal 4:

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education



Sustainable Development Goal 5:

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere



Sustainable Development Goal 8:

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training

8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

GOAL

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL TARGET



Sustainable Development Goal 10:

Reduce inequality within and among countries



Sustainable Development Goal 11:

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



Sustainable Development Goal 16:

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

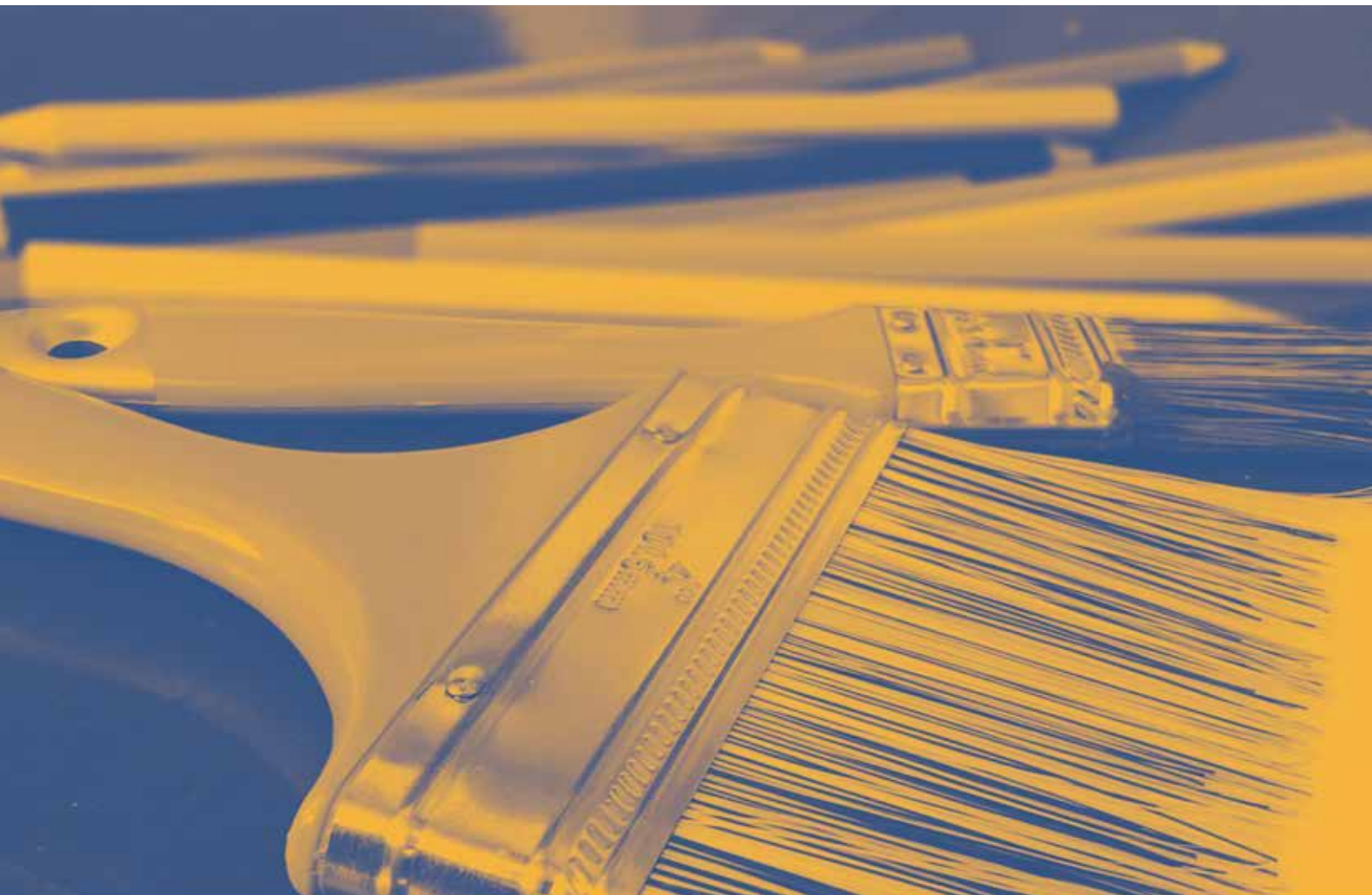
10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries

11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage

11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels



The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

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World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe

UN City, Marmorvej 51, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark

Tel.: +45 45 33 70 00 Fax: +45 45 33 70 01

E-mail: eupcrgov@who.int