Philanthropy Shows Up for the Youngest Refugees
Lessons from OSF’s Early Childhood Refugee & Migration Portfolio
17 November 2020

Presentation by Mari Ullmann of findings from a review commissioned by the Early Childhood Program of Open Society Foundation (OSF) London.

Watch the webinar recording online
**Webinar Agenda**

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| Reflections from Grantees and Other Partners | • **Lara Aoudeh**, Arab Resource Collective  
• **Paola Seremetis**, Major Development Agency Thessaloniki  
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• **Elvira Thissen**, Bernard van Leer Foundation |
| Discussion/Q&A                   | Led by moderator                                                          |
| Closing                          | **Kamela Usmani**, Program Officer, Early Childhood Program, Open Society Foundations |
OSF’s Early Childhood Refugee & Migration Team

Tina Hyder
Deputy Director

Almaz Ismayilova
Senior Program Specialist

Kamela Usmani
Program Officer

Henry Lewis
Joe Wood
Program Administrative Assistants
Key Questions

In commissioning the review of the Refugee & Migration Portfolio, ECP sought answers to the following questions:

• What did the portfolio contribute to the field? What was achieved through the thematic focus on displacement and through partnerships?

• Were the right topics identified to achieve the goals set out in the strategy for the portfolio?

• What were the intended and unintended outcomes of the strategy, partnerships and project interventions?

• What were the lessons learned, key challenges and successes?

• What approaches, methodologies and partnerships worked well or not so well? How can these be translated into lessons learned in grantmaking practice?
Methodology for the Informal Review

- **Document review** of ECP’s background and strategy documents, as well as grantee proposals and reports.

- **Remote, semi-structured interviews** with stakeholders:
  - Grantees (8)
  - Other partners (2)
  - OSF colleagues (3)
  - ECP staff (2)

- Original plan included site visits to select programs, however overseas travel became impossible due to the pandemic. Thus, the review and stakeholder interviews were conducted remotely.

- An analysis of stakeholder reflections revealed a number of **common themes**, which constitute the findings of the review.
# About the Refugee & Migration Portfolio

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<th>Vision:</th>
<th>Refugee parents are empowered to support their young children to reach their full potential</th>
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<td>Period:</td>
<td>First strategic period from 2017 through 2020</td>
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<td>Four Strategic Priorities:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Access to Quality Programs:</strong> Developing quality early childhood care and education models with improved access to quality services</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Supporting Parents/Caregivers:</strong> Enabling parents to increase their ability to support young children in difficult circumstances</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Integration:</strong> Addressing prejudice and discrimination in host communities to promote refugee integration</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Global advocacy:</strong> Increasing the visibility of young children and the resources going to ECD in emergencies / humanitarian response mechanisms</td>
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Findings

Key Themes Emerging from Stakeholder Interviews

Based on stakeholder experience and perceptions of ECP’s approach to grantmaking, these themes emerged as unique among donors, vital for the field, and highly appreciated, particularly among grantees and external partners:

1. Building a diverse portfolio designed to catalyze systemic change
2. Supporting different types of program models and organizations through trust-based philanthropy
3. Co-creating interventions based on locally identified needs
4. Leveraging partnerships across levels and contexts to strengthen the field
Building a diverse portfolio designed to catalyze systemic change

Characteristics of the ECP approach:
• Depth of thinking about the refugee issue
• Clarity of purpose focused on young children and caregivers
• Catalytic work toward systemic change and long-term sustainability

“Their board meetings were the most intellectually engaged on the refugee issue. ...the focus was not how to make an ECD program for refugees, but how to have systemic impact. They took seriously the idea of making the work relevant.”
– OSF colleague

“I always found them to be really goals-driven. They put a lot of time into thinking through the kind of work they wanted to support. All foundations intend to do that, but don’t always succeed. My sense is that they don’t have a huge budget [as compared to other programs at OSF], so they consider the initiative as a whole and look for ways to create opportunities across the portfolio.”
– Partner
Supporting different types of program models and organizations

Local cooperation: municipalities, community-based organizations, and academia:

- DIA-drasis Childcare Center, MDAT
- ECD Services on the Greek Islands, University of Patras
- Wandering Library, Greece, NGO Network for Children’s Rights
- Getting Ready for School, Uganda, Child to Child

Mobile

Peer to peer
Supporting smaller organizations and pilots

Supporting smaller, refugee-led orgs...

Little Ripples, iACT

Baytna, Refugee Trauma Initiative

Catalyzing innovation with larger INGOs...

Sesame in Humanitarian Settings, Sesame/IRC

Humanitarian Play Labs, Cox’s Bazar, BRAC
Strengthening the field by generating evidence

Research

ECEC Needs in 9 Host Countries in the EU/N. America, Migration Policy Institute (with others)

Caregiver Support Intervention, RCT in Lebanon, War Child Holland

Case Studies on Policies and Practices in 3 Host Countries (Bangladesh, Jordan, Uganda, RTI via Moving Minds Alliance...)

And more forthcoming via Moving Minds Alliance...
Strengthening the field by supporting and leveraging networks at all levels

Regional organizations and networks:
- HEPPP, ARC
- Building Bridges, ISSA
- Coordination Mechanism, Plan Jordan with BvLF

Global networks and advocacy:
- Moving Minds Alliance

Young children affected by crisis can grow up strong - if we support their families

Small Asks for Big Impact
Investing in the early years for sustainable development and peaceful societies
Building relationships based on trust and mutual respect

Characteristics of the ECP approach:
• Responsive and available, listening and mentoring
• Trusting the expertise and perspective of grantees
• Flexibility, understanding challenges of delivery in crisis contexts
• Willingness to step up and cover unforeseen gaps

“We do believe OSF has really trusted us. We became one – the same project. Other donors are more like a sponsor than a partner, with constant heavy reporting, rather than allowing us to grow in the project together.”
– Grantee

“The sense of distance between implementers and donors is usually very apparent. With OSF, there’s more a sense of partnership and that the relationship is a priority.”
– Grantee

“They have a real-world approach to grantmaking, and they’re very open when we encounter challenges. I always found them to have a very understanding ear. They’re always looking for a solution.”
– Partner
Co-creating interventions based on locally identified needs

Characteristics of the ECP approach:
• Open to ideas, co-creation, collaboration, and participatory grantmaking
• Respect for local partners and prioritizing locally identified needs
• Supportive and patient, allowing organizations/models to grow and develop

“Another thing the ECP team is great at is using a participatory approach. They included the grantee in the planning process and in developing the grants.”
– OSF Colleague

“OSF was one of the funding agencies that believed in giving the program a chance to continue to grow itself, to be updated, and to develop properly in order to reach where we are now. This was really empowering for the organization and for the program itself. It felt like our mission was also their mission.”
– Grantee

“They have sensitivity and respect for listening to the local needs. They start by asking people on the ground how they see the situation and what they need.”
– Grantee
Leveraging partnerships across levels and contexts to strengthen the field

Characteristics of the ECP approach:
- Planting the seeds for ‘big bet’ investments
- Facilitating networks and networking
- Partnering with government to sustain progress
- Supporting awareness-raising and advocacy

“Being part of the Moving Minds Alliance has been really central for us as a young, small organization. It helped significantly by bringing a spotlight on our program and bringing it into a new community of people interested in early childhood education. From there, we met other donors. I think that was huge for us, having a seat at the table with much larger organizations.”

– Grantee

“I always found the work of the Moving Minds Alliance to be quite productive, particularly that other people were brought along in addition to the funders. My sense is that this is something that has legs, with potential champions on board and people engaged who can take it forward.”

– OSF colleague
Areas for improvement

While the testimonies of colleagues, grantees, and partners were overwhelmingly positive, a few areas for improvement were noted:

• Funding limitations and gaps
• Internal foundation bureaucracy
• Online reporting portal could be more user-friendly

Reflections from the ECP team:

• Had hoped to continue building on the first set of grants during this strategic period
• If they had been able to continue the portfolio, would have liked to expand work to Latin America
**Recommendations**

“It’s crucially important that you get ECD right to come close to any semblance of an open society.” – OSF Colleague

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<th>To Open Society Foundations:</th>
<th>To Moving Minds Alliance members and other donors:</th>
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<td>• Continue to lead the field by addressing the need for ECD in crisis through other ongoing initiatives, e.g., education, women’s empowerment, health, migration, and access to basic rights</td>
<td>• Consider funding organizations and projects formerly supported by OSF’s Early Childhood Program</td>
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<td>• Continue to play a leadership role in the Moving Minds Alliance and other networks</td>
<td>• Support catalytic work through small, refugee-led and community-based organizations, emerging networks, and innovative models</td>
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<td><strong>To implementing agencies:</strong></td>
<td>• Partner with and engage majority communities, including local government, from the earliest stages, to build ownership and long-term sustainability into the plan and shape future policy and practice</td>
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<td>• Join the Moving Minds Alliance and other platforms for collective advocacy and knowledge exchange</td>
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Thank you!

Follow Moving Minds Alliance for news and resources on ECDiE:

Twitter: @MovingMindsECD #YoungestRefugees
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/moving-minds-alliance/

By Mari Ullmann, Independent Consultant

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Reflections

Lara Aoudeh, ECCD Programs Manager, Arab Resource Collective (ARC)
Paola Seremetis, Program Manager, Major Development Agency Thessaloniki (MDAT)
Katie-Jay Scott, Executive Director, iACT

Zarlasht Halaimzai, Director and Co-Founder, Refugee Trauma Initiative
Elvira Thissen, Representative, Refugee Response, Bernard van Leer Foundation; Steering Group Chair, Moving Minds Alliance
Joan Lombardi, Senior Scholar, Center for Child and Human Development, Georgetown University
Discussion