

Enhancing Refugee Self-Reliance and Wellbeing through quality, holistic and gender transformative Early Childhood Development in Emergencies (ECDiE)

Multi Stakeholder Pledge

This multistakeholder pledge will support the delivery of new financial, technical, and material support for host country policies, services, and systems in relation to Early Childhood Development. It is aligned with one key objective of the Global Compact on Refugees: Objective 2 (Enhance refugee self-reliance). Additionally, it can support the achievement of Objective 4 (Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity), particularly in measures to prevent conflict and build peace in host countries and countries of origin.

Leadership

UNHCR Education Alliance Early Childhood Development (ECD) Task Team members¹; Moving Minds Alliance (MMA) and MMA Donors (including LEGO Foundation, Bernard Van Leer Foundation, Hilton Foundation, Sesame Workshop, and Porticus); other multilateral and philanthropic/private sector donors investing in ECD; International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs) - all in service to host governments committed to holistic and refugee-inclusive ECD.

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Calendar

July – August 2023: co-creation phase of the pledge.

September – December 2023: mobilization, socialization, and validation phase for support and matching of pledge, including consultations with refugees and refugee-led and supporting organizations, and convening of partners/pledge leaders.

December 12 – launch and discussion of pledge with key stakeholders/actors at Education Campus.

Key outcome

Low and Middle Income Country (LMIC) member states hosting refugees are supported across implicated sectors, and across humanitarian, development, and peace interventions, to ensure that youngest children and their caregivers in all their diversity from refugee, displaced and host communities have access to national and local systems that support quality, holistic, gender transformative and multi-sectoral early childhood services and supports that advance refugee wellbeing, self-reliance, inclusion in national systems, durable solutions, peace, and social cohesion.

Background

Early childhood, the period below the age of 8 years, is the most important phase of development in a person's life (Likhar, Baghel, Patil, 2022). **The physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development that occurs during early childhood lays the critical foundations for a child's well-being and resilience, mental and physical health, ability to form and maintain respectful relationships with**

¹ ECD Task Team members include representatives from (in alphabetical order): Amal Alliance, AMNA, Bernard Van Leer Foundation, BRAC IED/International, Children Believe, Early Childhood Development Action Network, Global Initiative to Support Parents, Hilton Foundation, Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, iACT, IRC, LEGO Foundation, Moving Minds Alliance, Plan International, Refugee Innovation Centre, Save the Children UK, Seedling Education, Sesame Workshop, UNHCR, UNICEF, University of Virginia, War Child UK, World Vision Canada.

others, learning and academic progress, and social and economic participation for the rest of their lives.

With an estimated 43.3 million children forcibly displaced (UNICEF, 2023), there is an urgent need to prioritize and invest in quality, holistic, and gender-transformative early childhood systems and support for children and caregivers in crises. Youngest children (ages 0-8) bear the greatest burden of poverty, disease, disability, war, social marginalization, and limited health, nutrition, and education services and are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of crisis and conflict.

Caregivers are the most important protective function for the child, their well-being and capacity to manage their stress and trauma has a direct impact on their child(ren). It is therefore essential that services work with both caregiver and child. Trauma and stress can affect the ability of refugee caregivers to provide the nurturing, supportive care their children need for their well-being and healthy development (Arakelyan & Ager, 2021). Additionally, exposure to prolonged and intersecting stressors can affect children's mental health, resulting in symptoms of complex stress disorder), and behavioral and emotional problems (Moving Minds Alliance, MHPSS #6, 2023).

There is evidence that exposure to conflict during the first 1,000 days in a child's life can cause developmental delays that impact education achievements (Goto, Frodl & Skokauskas, 2021). Enrolment rates of refugee children in early childhood education programs are commonly significantly lower than those of non-refugee children (Bove & Sharmahd, 2020), with lack of services, cost, location, low awareness, and concerns about security, particularly for girls, being some of the barriers to access for refugees and host communities. Many children living in refugee settings, therefore, have limited opportunities for play and learning, which is essential for well-being, development, resilience, and connection with peers. Lack of early childhood services can also limit access of girls to primary and secondary education, when domestic responsibilities, including care for younger children, is prioritized over education. Additionally, relatively low salaries for ECE educators coupled with job insecurity and low value placed on ECE contribute to challenges in attracting and retaining suitably qualified early childhood educators (Rao et al., 2022b). These challenges are especially acute in humanitarian settings.

The Nurturing Care Framework provides the basis for Global Refugee Forum pledges encompassing early learning, responsive parenting, good mental and physical health, nutrition, safety, and security, recognizing the cross-sectoral nature of ECD. Progress towards existing commitments, for example under SDG4.2 on early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education and the Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education, all necessitate expansion of inclusive, quality, and gender transformative ECD services and supports to children, including refugee, displaced and host community children, in all their diversity.

Early Childhood Development services in humanitarian and fragile settings provide life-saving and life-sustaining support for children and their families. They are integral to ending preventable deaths of newborns and children under five, supporting healthy and holistic development, achievement of the foundational learning skills essential for success in school and in life, and the mental health and psychosocial well-being of youngest children and their caregivers. ECD interventions are also an important entry point for peacebuilding, social cohesion, resilience, and reducing inequities in communities and countries. The formative years of children's lives represent an opportunity to lay the foundations for transformative change and to support the youngest children to learn values, skills, and behaviors for peace. Additionally, quality, gender-transformative ECD services can have a significant impact on closing the gender divide and reducing impacts of gender inequality later in life, particularly

for girls and women, including through addressing gender stereotypes and norms that perpetuate inequality, gender-based violence and the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. Investments in the early years deliver some of the greatest public policy returns to countries in terms of future savings in areas such as social services, health, and education that go beyond individual families and children, expanding to society at large.

Despite the body of evidence highlighting the positive impacts of investing in nurturing care, funding for ECD interventions, including through GRF, remains a considerable constraint. Globally, ECD accounts for just over 3 percent of all development assistance going to crisis-affected countries and only 2 percent of humanitarian assistance (Moving Minds Alliance 2020). The current lack of data has been identified as an important obstacle to the prioritization of ECD work in humanitarian contexts (Ponguta et al., 2022), this includes a lack of data on access and quality that tracks financing of ECD in crisis settings.

In the context of the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR), there is a unique opportunity to positively impact displaced children, their families, and host communities by leveraging increased quality and quantity of financing, investing in locally-led and scalable solutions, and improving cross-sector coordination and accountability. There is also an opportunity to recognize the diversity of humanitarian and displacement contexts, and that there is a need for government and other actors to respond considering not only short-term solutions, but in ways that promote long-term integration, inclusion, social cohesion and peaceful co-existence between refugee and host communities.

Pledge description

This pledge aims to engage relevant stakeholders (governments, bilateral and multilateral institutions, INGOs, local NGOs, civil society, and the private sector), in the provision of financial, technical, and material resources to ensure that refugee, displaced and host community children (ages 0-8) and their caregivers in all their diversity, benefit from quality, holistic, integrated, and gender transformative ECD policies and services, aligned with the Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development. This includes a particular recognition that there are local ECD organisations and experts active in refugee, displaced and host communities ready to provide downstream support to pledges from government or international actors.

Operationalized through a multi-sectoral, coordinated approach, the ECD multistakeholder pledge incorporates the following aspects, to be selected and adapted by actors making specific commitments, recognizing that each party to this pledge has unique remits, responsibilities, resources, and capacities, and that each refugee and displacement context is different:

1. Financing

- Funders, including bilateral and multilateral donors, **invest at least 10% of humanitarian funding to support local, national, and community organizations and host governments as well as international organizations**, where appropriate, to scale up local ECD solutions. Ensure that humanitarian funding is connected to existing development initiatives through cross-sectoral coordination and accountability, for improved national ECD service delivery.
- **Investments in ECD to be made early, equitably, and with high quality**, including ensuring that local and national ECD actors and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), who are experts in the context, are the first to respond, and the best placed to provide sustained responses for

refugee and host populations are directly funded and included in decision making about program design, implementation and evaluation given their expert knowledge and experience.

- Provide flexible and multi-year funding that is particularly targeted at strengthening local ECD actors and systems, with a view to sustainability.
- Ensure adequate **investments in ECD infrastructure** to increase and improve the service delivery capacity of local ECD actors and CBOs.

2. **Multisectoral Coordination**

- Development and implementation of a holistic, integrated, and multisectoral **national ECD policy** that is inclusive of refugee and displaced children, their caregivers, and host communities.
- Government establishment of a **national ECD coordination platform** to support the provision of high-quality ECD programming for refugee and displaced children, their caregivers and host communities.

3. **Evidence Generation and Advocacy**

- Leverage local and community-led research institutions to support **evidence generation** demonstrating the impact of low-cost, high-impact holistic and multisectoral ECD interventions for refugee and displaced children, their caregivers, and host communities.
- **Collect and report age, sex, and disability disaggregated data** and evidence on the early childhood age group, including identifying gaps in service provision, and ensuring greater accountability for results.
- Support **advocacy and sharing of best practices** relating to ECD, including **joint advocacy with affected populations** (children, caregivers), to increase visibility and elevate the importance of ECD programming in humanitarian, fragile, and development refugee response settings, to attract increased funding and ensure inclusion of ECD in humanitarian response plans.

4. **Early Childhood Education**

- Provide **access to a minimum of 1 year of quality, inclusive, play-based pre-primary/early childhood education** for all refugee and host community children, and ensure their transition into primary school.
- Embed **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) + social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions** into national education curriculum and budgets, starting from early childhood education, including ensuring that teachers are trained and supported to deliver MHPSS + SEL through play-based approaches.
- Invest and improve in the **recruitment, retention, and continuous professional development** of the early childhood education workforce, including refugee and community-based teachers and facilitators starting from preschool education and integrated into early education.

5. **Responsive Caregiving and Caring for the Caregiver**

- **Enhance knowledge and skills of parents and caregivers to provide responsive care** and support children's learning from birth, including through whole family/caregiver and child interventions
- **Support caregivers' mental health, well-being, and livelihoods** to enhance the provision of nurturing care to their children and strengthen family functioning.

6. **Health**

- Support the **health and well-being of refugee and displaced children**, including addressing the mental health and psychosocial support needs of children and their caregivers through trauma-informed care and psychological first aid provided by trained teachers/practitioners.
 - Support sustainable inclusion of refugee and displaced children and their caregivers in **maternal and child health systems and services, and in social health protection schemes**, including through capacity building of health personnel.
7. **Nutrition**
- Support **good nutrition for children under 5, pregnant and lactating women, and adolescent mothers**, recognizing their particular vulnerability to malnutrition and stunting.
8. **Safety and Security**
- Ensure that refugee and displaced children have **non-discriminatory inclusion in, and access to, quality national and local child protection systems and services** for protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence, including gender-based violence, and harmful practices, through integration and coordination of ECD and child protection in emergencies programming.
 - Consider the particular vulnerability of refugee and displaced children to environmental risks, including climate change, and **support climate adaptation and resilience** through ensuring access to nurturing care, playful early learning, holistic development opportunities, and protection from violence and abuse.
9. **Peace, Social Cohesion and Gender Equality**
- Commit to ECD programs in host countries and countries of origin that **reinforce positive values, attitudes, and skills that contribute to peace and social cohesion and the valuing of diversity**, so that children grow up with the vision, desire, and capability to live peacefully, with benefits to families, communities, and countries.
 - Ensure that ECD programs help to **reduce impacts of gender inequality**.

Further reading:

- [Why should refugee host governments and donors invest in the early years of children's lives and their caregivers?](#)
- [Young Children in Crisis Resource Kit: how holistic childhood services link with all sectors of \(Gender, Nutrition, Protection, MHPSS, Education, and more\)](#)

Annex: Related pledges to match

Pledge analysis arising from the 2019 Global Refugee Forum shows that 15.2% of pledges (34) specify ECD/ECE, of which 23.5% (8) are standalone ECD/ECE pledges, and 76.5% (26) are multi-outcome pledges.

Sample government pledges from 2019 are:

Turkey: Ministry of National Education (MoNE) adopted an inclusive and comprehensive education policy for Syrian children under temporary protection in Turkey (SuTP). MoNE believes that Early Childhood Education has a considerable effect on social cohesion, school retention and success, and wishes to build necessary capacity to host 300,000 Syrian and host community children at early childhood education age in Turkish public education system including summer programs. Are implementing projects on Promoting the Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES) and an 8 week Early Childhood Education Program. MoNE invites all stakeholders to make contributions and share the burden and responsibility.

Zambia: To maintain refugee inclusion in the national education system at all levels, including providing free early childhood, primary education, as well as secondary and tertiary.

Guatemala: The Ministry of Education, in accordance with ministerial agreement No. 1753-2019 "Regulations on the equalization and equivalence of studies at pre-primary, primary and secondary education levels and in the sub-systems of school and non-formal education", provides for the equalization and equivalence of returned students and the equalization and equivalence of migrant students who do not have documentation, since their departure from their country of origin or residence was due to circumstances beyond their control, can continue to carry out, complete or legalize their studies in the National Education System.

Non-State Actors whose pledges included early childhood include:

- Dubai Cares
- Education for All Coalition
- Humanitarian Collaborative, Batten School, University of Virginia
- Moving Minds Alliance

- Plan International
- Save the Children International
- Sesame Workshop
- World Vision International
- LEGO Foundation
- IRC, BIT and IPA re research and policy