ALLIANCE POST

Reimagining Early Years Crisis Response

June 2025
Vol. 2. Issue 1

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Message from the Cochair & Interim Director

KATIE MURPHY
International Rescue Committee

Dear Colleagues and Partners,

On behalf of the Moving Minds Alliance, it is a great pleasure to welcome you to this refreshed edition of the Moving Minds Alliance (MMA) Bulletin—now a bimonthly external publication aligned with our strategic priorities to grow and diversify the community of advocates for early childhood development in crisis and conflict settings, and to generate and promote the uptake of evidence and learning.

This edition focuses on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)—a vital thread that cuts across all aspects of nurturing care. In times of crisis, the mental well-being of young children, their caregivers, and the providers within the systems supporting them is often overlooked. Yet, it is foundational to resilience, recovery, and long-term development. By spotlighting mental health, we aim to elevate its importance and share promising practices, research, and voices from across our growing community.

As part of this new format, each edition will feature a guest editor and contributors from the field—bringing fresh perspectives, lived experience, and deep expertise to enrich our collective understanding and action. We are especially thrilled to welcome Prof. Catherine Draper, one of the lead researchers behind The Lancet's Next 1000 Days series, as the guest editor for this edition.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we can ensure that every child not only survives but thrives—even in the most challenging circumstances.

MMA is in a period of dynamic transition—stronger, more connected, and more determined than ever. As we evolve, our mission remains clear: to advocate for better outcomes and greater equity for young children affected by crises everywhere. This bulletin is one of many ways we are opening up our work, amplifying diverse perspectives, and fostering collaboration across sectors and geographies.

REFLECTIONS OF THE GUEST EDITOR

Early Childhood Development and the Next 1000 Days: Implications for Children in Crisis Settings

In November 2024, The Lancet published a two-paper series on 'Early childhood development and the next 1000 days', to bring attention to the age group (2-5 years) following the first 1000 days. The first series paper[1] highlighted the importance of building on early investments for the health and development of young children; the second paper[2] summarised the benefits and costs of key strategies to support children's development in the next 1000 days.

This period is a critical window for the significant growth of a range of skills that are important for young children's development. It is an opportunity to mitigate environmental risks, promote protective factors, and establish healthy developmental and behavioural trajectories. Furthermore, it is a chance to build on gains and safeguard investments made in the first 1000 days, and recalibrate trajectories where opportunities were lost in the previous 1000 days. Importantly, the series was not trying to claim that the next 1000 days are more important than the first 1000 days, but rather that these both matter.

The series had a focus on low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), with a call to pay attention to the most vulnerable children in this age group. This must include children in crisis settings, especially considering the rise in geopolitical conflicts across the globe. It is timely to reflect on the implications of this recently presented evidence from the next 1000 days on children in crisis settings.

Key developmental outcomes in the first 1000 days include cognitive, motor and social emotional development; numeracy, language and literacy skills; and self-regulation – all of which help prepare young children for navigating formal schooling. Importantly, the nurturing care framework still applies in the next 1000 days, and should be used as a framework to understand what children need to thrive in this age group. The components of nurturing care (early learning, responsive caregiving, security and safety, health, nutrition) all influence these outcomes in this age group, both from a programme perspective, as well as in terms of supportive policies that provide an enabling environment for the achievement of these developmental outcomes in the next 1000 days.

It is not difficult to conceive how all components of nurturing care, along with supportive policies, are threatened in crisis settings, thereby impacting on children's development in the next 1000 days. For example, we can easily see how the social-emotional development of a 2-5y old child is negatively impacted in a crisis setting. The child's caregivers would be experiencing challenges with their mental health, they would not be receiving the support they need, and their family would be in chaos, making it incredibly hard for them to be responsive in their caregiving. The child in this situation would have limited opportunities to play safely with their friends or attend an early learning programme, and the state of their physical health and nutrition would likely be compromised. It is therefore critical that caregivers are given the support they need to provide nurturing care for their children in these settings.

As part of the series, a set of reviews was conducted on the various environments that shape children's development in the next 1000 days**. Key take-aways** from these reviews emphasised that 1) we need to **build on parenting investments from the first to the next 1000 days**; 2) access, equity and quality of care and **early learning outside of the home matter**; 3) **multi-sector actions need to be prioritised**; and 4) **more attention** should be paid **to developmental disabilities, and the impacts of climate change and pollution on young children**. Once again, it is not difficult to see how the environments that shape young children's development are under threat in crisis settings.

In these settings, investments in parenting in the first and next 1000 days would be compromised; access to quality of early learning opportunities both inside and outside of the home would be compromised; multi-sector actions may be unrealistic; and the risks for children with disabilities, and those already suffering the impacts of climate change and pollution would be amplified.

The series also included new evidence that highlighted that challenges to the provision of nurturing care in LMICs, and the impact this has on development in the next 1000 days. This evidence showed that only 1 in 4 children (3-4y) receive adequate nurturing care in LMICs, and that children who have received early learning support and responsive care are approximately 2 years ahead in development. Furthermore, new evidence reported on the dominance of high-income western countries when it comes to interventions promoting early childhood development in the next 1000 days. All this evidence emphasises the mismatch between the global regions where interventions are most needed and the areas where interventions are being implemented, evaluated, and published. In addition, the structural barriers hindering the provision of nurturing care in LMICs are exacerbated by crises, and both the optimal implementation and evaluation of early childhood development interventions become less likely.

Lastly, **the series provided evidence on the cost of not investing in the next 1000 days, highlighting that the benefits far outweigh the costs. Specifically, providing one year of early childhood care and education (ECCE) to all children costs on average less than 1% of gross domestic product, and the benefits of providing this one year of ECCE to all children are on average 8-19x larger than the cost of implementing these in LMICs.** However, crises threaten government investments when there are so many competing priorities, and the provision of quality ECCE services is also threatened.

In conclusion, more evidence is needed for the next 1000 days from LMICs, and we cannot leave out children in crisis settings who are arguably the most vulnerable. Importantly, this series is not advocating for a deficit model of early childhood development or blaming caregivers for not providing nurturing care in any setting. Rather, the intention is to emphasise and build upon the strengths of communities, families, and children – including those in crises settings. But taking a strengths-based approach does not mean ignoring risks and injustices. Collectively, we need to continue to shine a light on these risks and injustices and build support for the children who need our help the most.

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Catherine Draper (PhD)

Guest Editor

Associate Professor
SAMRC Developmental Pathways for Health
Research Unit, University of the Witwatersrand
South Africa

Children in Crisis: A June 2025 Snapshot

Across the globe, June 2025 laid bare the escalating toll of conflict, displacement, and deprivation on children. From Gaza to Sudan, and from Afghanistan to the (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) IGAD region, the headlines are gloomy, but there is hope.

- In Gaza, children are facing a dual crisis: a collapsing health system and a deepening hunger emergency. As war rages on, access to clean water and medical care has become a luxury, not a right. (SOS Children's Villages)

- In crisis zones, play is proving to be a powerful tool for healing. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) highlights how structured playtime is helping children process trauma and reclaim a sense of normalcy. (MSF UK)

- On World Day Against Child Labour, attention turned to Sudan's children, many of whom are forced to work to survive. (Dabanga)

- As terrorist herdsmen attacks on communities in Benue State, Nigeria continue to increase, New Telegraph reports that thousands of fleeing children now have reduced access to education in the state.

- The IGAD region—spanning parts of East Africa—is witnessing a growing humanitarian emergency. Displacement, food insecurity, and lack of access to education are pushing children to the brink. (EastLeigh Voice)

- Refugee children fleeing violence in Sudan are receiving emergency aid in Chad, but the needs far outstrip the resources available. (UNICEF USA). In Okaloosa County, students raised over $9,600 for emergency shelters for children. (Get The Coast). In Afghanistan, a new initiative by UNICEF and the UK government—"First Foods Afghanistan"—aims to combat alarming rates of child malnutrition. (Daryo)

- Gaza's water crisis is worsening, posing a looming threat to children's health. (Devdiscourse). UNICEF urged Israel to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza as children face a dangerous hunger crisis. (Daily Times). Human Rights Watch reported a sharp rise in violations against children in armed conflict, underscoring the urgent need for global action. (Human Rights Watch)

- The head of the U.N. children's agency UNICEF warned of a "worsening crisis" for hundreds of thousands of children who have fled Sudan's war into eastern Chad, saying host communities are stretched beyond capacity and humanitarian funding is falling critically short. (Sudan Tribune)

- Human Rights Watch reports that US and other foreign donor cutbacks in humanitarian aid have worsened the existing education crisis for 437,000 school-age children in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, with schools that served hundreds of thousands of children shut down.
- In her remarks at the UN Security Council open debate, UNICEF Director of child protection Sheema Sen Gupta shared strategies to end and prevent grave violations against children in armed conflict.

Lola Ayanda & Chiamaka Eneja

Expanding Avenues for Financing: Innovative Finance for Mental Health

Katy Anís and Tishya Mahajan, Coalescence Advisory Services

In fragile settings, where families live with layers of crisis—from displacement and conflict to food insecurity and persistent economic stress—mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) are not optional. That support is a lifeline that increases resilience and coping.

Despite growing recognition of its importance, MHPSS remains chronically underfunded or completely unfunded, particularly in the early years and in humanitarian contexts. When addressed, mental health is often carved out into isolated, short-term projects rather than treated as a core thread within broader systems of support. Interventions arrive too late—or not at all. The result? Caregivers pass chronic stress to their children, and children grow up falling short of their developmental potential. Economies suffer, and longevity is reduced.[1] [2]

Children exposed to perinatal depression of caregivers experience a lifetime reduction in earnings of £1,400, and untreated perinatal depression costs USD 14.2 billion over five years for both mother and child.[3] The World Economic Forum estimates the cumulative global cost of mental disorders at USD 16 trillion by 2030[4] due to healthcare costs, lost earnings, and social service expenses.

Mothers with internalising behaviours, such as depression, have children—and even grandchildren—with higher rates of aggression and depression, exemplifying the multigenerational effects of early childhood development and its power either to entrench cycles of poverty or to amplify cycles of prosperity.[5]

In 2024-2025, the Moving Minds Alliance Innovative Finance Working Group mapped more than 100 initiatives in its landscaping study, "Innovative Finance to Address Children, Caregivers and Families Affected by Crisis, Displacement, and Fragile Contexts".[6] The landscaping underscored a crucial truth: families are frontline service providers—often the first and only responders to a child under stress. The findings were sobering: while capital has been flowing into climate, gender-lens investing, and other Sustainable Development Goals, MHPSS spending remains siloed, fragmented, and far below what is needed.

Financing that mirrors children's and caregivers' lived realities must cut across sectors, linking mental health with safety, nutrition, learning, and economic sustenance while recognising the pivotal role of caregivers. By opening more diverse avenues to access resources—and more diverse delivery models—at the time when brain development is most rapid, we can build human resilience now rather than merely treating trauma downstream. Prevention is more cost-effective than remediation.

Innovative finance is more than a new channel for capital: it demands a shift in mindset. It challenges development practitioners to consider alternatives to grants as a means of creating impact. Blended-finance interventions create space for unlikely actors to collaborate through non-traditional structures.

> **To chart the course, the Coalition for Mental Health Investment will be publishing a mental health financing guidebook later this summer, which calls for mental-health funding that is protected, predictable, and sustainable.[7] The guidebook outlines blended-finance structures, insurance-linked models, and outcome-based contracts—tools designed to embed mental health within broader development agendas.**

Its findings detail how mental health financing can be categorised as products, services or system-enabling activities, that traditional and innovative financing mechanisms vary based on the type of intervention, and that mental health interventions can have different levels of financial return correlated with the source of funding. They recommend applying differing financing mechanisms across the value chain to address specific market failures, as well as identify the 'unlocks' that can enable scaling in public health and private sector contexts.

Momentum is also building among innovators. In November 2024, the Being Initiative convened leaders from philanthropy, development finance, and technology at the Being Global Gathering in Rabat, Morocco.[8] The event, hosted with Grand Challenges Canada, showcased blended-finance solutions for youth mental health anchored in measurable psychosocial outcomes. Shamiri Summit 2024 in Nairobi highlighted mental health innovation in Africa. 2025 online convenings on mental health finance innovation in Africa highlight how outcome-based contracting is being pioneered for mental health in East Africa, alongside venture-capital investments.[9]

These shifts point to a simple but urgent agenda: move from funding symptoms, isolated projects, and dependence on grant funding to financing systems and multiple financing pathways for different components of mental health.

Concretely, that means:

• **Aligning capital with care:** pooled or pay-for-success funds that channel multi-year resources to family-centred MHPSS.

• **Sharing risk:** blended structures that de-risk early investment for private capital while protecting public and philanthropic goals.

• **Measuring what matters:** metrics that capture intergenerational wellbeing, not merely clinic visits, in contexts of crisis and displacement.[10]

• **Mapping the continuum of crisis across the continuum of capital,** through blended structuring, with a greater proportion of commercial capital in developed markets, a greater proportion of concessional capital in emerging markets and a greater proportion of philanthropic capital in fragile markets.

Sound decision-making at the global level and healthy resilience at the community level both rest on foundational mental health in the early years. Geopolitical shifts in funding are forcing creative innovation in new pathways for financing mental health.

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FEATURED BLOGS

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Shut Out: How Visa Denials Undermine Refugee Leaders' Advocacy for Children in Crisis

Unbounded Associates | MMA

Help, Hazard or Hype: Reflections from Humanitarian AI Learning Journey

ERLA

Nurturing Those Who Nurture: Insights from the Learning Series on Psychosocial Support for Caregivers in Crisis Settings

Global Schools Forum & Partners

Why Child Protection Must Be Non-Negotiable in Humanitarian Response

Alliance for Child Protection (CHPA)

Beyond Control: Reimagining Philanthropy for True Emergence and Inclusion

Moving Minds Alliance

The Psychological Well-being of Young Children in Arab Countries: Between Challenges and the Need for Action

Arab Network for Early Childhood

Economic, social, and political factors play a crucial role in shaping the reality of community mental health. The Arab region is filled with a poly-crisis that creates a fertile ground for destabilising this well-being. These factors include conflicts, wars, displacement, lack of security, poverty, class disparities—and the resulting unavailability of mental and community health services for individuals who cannot afford them—further compounded by limited access to education and essential healthcare.

Additionally, many national strategies regarding mental health services are still inadequate. These strategies detach the issue from a comprehensive public policy perspective, separating mental health from societal life and the socio-economic factors that impact individuals. They fail to acknowledge it as a vital component in the development of young children and as a fundamental human right for children.

> **"Although the Arab region, in particular, has faced decades of turmoil, conflicts, and full-fledged poly-crisis, there is a striking scarcity of studies addressing community mental health".**

Published literature on mental health, especially regarding early childhood, is notably limited, creating a significant gap that impedes recovery efforts. In response, many institutions and research centres focused on early childhood have intensified their efforts over the past decade to bridge this research gap.

Decades of tragedies and attempts to close gaps

The rising number of wars in Arab countries over the past decades has intensified the need to meet basic survival needs. Yet, the gap remains significant, exacerbated by reduced funding, shortages of specialised personnel, and logistical challenges, such as reliance on limited samples due to difficulties in accessing children in war zones. Cultural and social factors also create obstacles, as the stigma surrounding mental health continues to prevail in many Arab societies, especially those facing acute security, political, and social instability. This stigma affects the reporting levels of traumatic events, which in turn leads to severe psychological disorders among victims, particularly vulnerable young children.

Discussing young children in Arab countries—among the world's most war-torn, economically unstable, and socially fragmented regions—entails addressing not only one generation's trauma and its resulting psychological crises but also intergenerational trauma and severe psychological conditions. For over half a century, this region has been plagued by ongoing conflict. Continuous wars and dire socioeconomic circumstances have subjected young children, families, and caregivers to repeated traumas, leading to psychological, behavioural,

and emotional issues. Numerous studies on mental health in the region have shown for more than a decade that children and adolescents in conflict zones face elevated levels of psychological trauma.

With the number of wars reaching record levels over the past two years, psychological trauma has surged. According to UNICEF, 2024 was one of the worst years for children in war zones. Conditions have only worsened this year. Arab countries face all the factors that have a devastating impact, especially on young children and their caregivers: killing, displacement, destruction, starvation, targeting of health and education sectors, and more; in short, the threat to their survival and future.

The Gaza Strip has endured a near-two-year genocide, with every human and child right violated without exception. While UNICEF had previously reported that half a million children needed mental health services before the current war, it declared last year that every child in Gaza now requires such support, with each having endured traumatic events and psychological distress as of November 2024. Over half a year later, the genocide has only intensified. Compounding the suffering, caregivers themselves endure continuous trauma, limiting their ability to meet children's needs. The same applies to the occupied West Bank. In 2023, the area experienced a record year for child displacement, following two years of escalating killings, forced removals, home demolitions, and attacks on education.

In Lebanon, which has endured a severe economic crisis for years, worsened by the latest Israeli war, UNICEF noted early this year that the conflict has had a devastating impact on children, affecting every aspect of their lives. Data show an increasing trend in anxiety, stress, sadness, and depression among children. With ongoing Israeli occupation, violations, heightened targeting and intimidation, and the prevention of children from living normally, this trend continues to escalate.

Sudan is no exception to this grim landscape. The country, facing the world's largest child displacement crisis, sees its children are subjected to severe psychological violations: killing, maiming, famine, displacement, recruitment, child labor, destruction of education, early marriage, trafficking, and sexual violence—including assaults on infants under one year old—with no end to the list.

Yemen has also endured a heavy share of tragedies in recent years, leaving a staggering impact on children, families, and caregivers, affecting all aspects of life and, consequently, mental health.
In simple terms, there is a direct correlation between poly-crisis and children's psychological well-being. Although we cannot control a crisis, we can make a difference through psychological intervention and support, increased research efforts, and adjustments to national policies and strategies to steer them in the right direction.

After surviving nearly two years of genocide, every child in the Gaza Strip is in urgent need of mental health support.
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Early Evidence

A Moving Minds Alliance
Bi-monthly Podcast

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Episode 1

Host & Researcher
Dulguun Batmunkh

Editor & Producer
Lola Ayanda

Recording Date
18th June, 2025

In this episode of Early Evidence, Moving Minds Alliance spotlights the groundbreaking work of two leading scholars from the Social Research Institute at University College London (UCL): Dr. Kelly Dickson and Dr. Rosa Mendizabal-Espinosa. Their research, anchored in global health, wellbeing, and critical qualitative inquiry, offers essential insights into early childhood development in contexts of crisis, displacement, and fragile health systems.

Kelly, a clinical integrative psychotherapist and Associate Professor in Global Health and Wellbeing at UCL, shares findings from her recent systematic reviews on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for children and youth affected by humanitarian emergencies. Her work sheds light on what actually works and why when delivering MHPSS in low- and middle-income countries, challenging assumptions and elevating the voices of communities is at the heart of these interventions.

Meanwhile, Espinosa, a Senior Research Fellow and Lecturer at UCL, brings listeners into the neonatal intensive care system of Mexico through a critical realist lens. From cultural norms to systemic barriers, she examines how non-evidence-based beliefs perpetuate inequality in neonatal care and how researchers can respond with more grounded, human-centered approaches.

Together, their reflections offer a powerful and nuanced conversation on why mental health, wellbeing, and children's rights must be prioritized in emergency settings, making this episode essential listening for researchers, practitioners, and funders seeking to translate evidence into meaningful, equitable outcomes for the youngest and most vulnerable. Click to listen and join the dialogue on research that redefines what it truly means for children to thrive in times of crisis.

Caring for Those Who Care: Embedding Mental Health and Self-Care into Early Childhood Systems

When crisis strikes, the most vulnerable are often young children. Yet their first and most crucial line of defense is not a programme or policy, but the adults who care for them. Early childhood education and care practitioners, health workers, and social workers serve as a protective buffer, helping children navigate trauma, displacement, and instability. But too often, these caregivers shoulder immense emotional burdens themselves, operating under the same toxic stress as the families they serve.

Since 2022, ISSA's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) work has focused on addressing this gap head-on. Recognising that the well-being of young children is inseparable from that of their caregivers, ISSA and its members have worked to ensure that self-care, trauma-informed practices, and psychological support are embedded within early childhood systems across countries.

A network response to a growing crisis

The start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 forced millions of families from their homes and upended early childhood services across the region. Practitioners across ISSA's network voiced a common concern: while committed to helping children, they felt unprepared to address the depth of trauma unfolding around them. They needed practical, evidence-based tools that would equip them to support both children and themselves.

In partnership with Amna and War Child, ISSA developed the **Foundational Training on Psychological First Aid (PFA) and Trauma-Informed Practices.** Delivered through a Training-of-Trainers model, the program built workforce capacity quickly and sustainably. Today, more than 200 master trainers across 21 countries are certified to deliver the course, supported by a multilingual resource package now available in 12 languages. Through cascading trainings, over 14,300 frontline professionals have been trained, reaching tens of thousands of children and families with trauma-sensitive care. Based on data available at the end of 2023, this reach was assessed across four of the countries where the training was held, with the total expected impact anticipated to be significantly larger as national rollouts continue.

Click photo to download resource

Self-care remains a difficult topic for many professionals, often dismissed as indulgent or unnecessary. As Zsuzsa László from ISSA Member Partners Hungary Foundation observed, silence often follows when educators are asked how much self-care they practice. In Kazakhstan, self-care is still considered taboo; many feel embarrassed to seek support or acknowledge emotional strain. The training helps professionals recognise burnout as a serious risk and integrate self-care into their routines. As one Croatian study noted, nearly 50% of new educators had previously considered leaving the field due to burnout. Today, many report using self-care diaries and mindfulness spaces to manage stress.

Working within and strengthening systems

ISSA members have worked intensively to embed these competencies into national systems and ensure that self-care and trauma-informed practice are not optional extras but core requirements. In Kazakhstan, ISSA Member Community Educational Foundation “School for All" has partnered with Abai University to integrate PFA modules into pre-service teacher training, ensuring that new educators enter the workforce equipped to manage their own and young children's stress and trauma. In Slovenia, the Education Research Institute secured national accreditation, so participation in the PFA training counts toward teachers' mandatory in-service hours. In Montenegro, university faculty members were trained to embed PFA content into coursework, reaching hundreds of students.

Member organisations have also tailored the training to their specific contexts. In Croatia, Open Academy Step by Step reshaped the PFA training into a burnout prevention program that centers self-care. In Serbia, CIP - Center for Interactive Pedagogy developed accredited modules combining social-emotional learning, mentoring, and reflective practice. Partners Hungary Foundation has designed interactive delivery methods that encourage early childhood professionals to integrate self-care into their own daily routines.

Adaptation rooted in local contexts

The strength of ISSA's approach lies in its networked model, which allows member organisations to adapt resources for their national realities while sharing experiences across borders.

In Bulgaria, for example, ISSA member For Our Children established professional learning communities where educators exchange real-life experiences and peer support. In Ukraine, where educators continue working under the shadow of war, the training offers critical tools to maintain stability and emotional grounding, even during air-raid sirens.

ISSA's Embracing Diversity program complements this work by addressing inclusion, bias, and cultural responsiveness alongside trauma-informed practice. The training offers early childhood professionals practical strategies for creating emotionally safe, inclusive environments for refugee, migrant, and marginalised children. In Kosovo, Latvia, and Hungary, Embracing Diversity has been embedded into professional development frameworks, ensuring that educators can both recognise their own biases and respond empathetically to children's diverse needs.

Practical resources to build capacity

To sustain this transformation, ISSA and our partners have developed open-access resources that serve both practitioners and trainers:

- Brief on Integrating Psychological First Aid and trauma-informed practices into early childhood systems
- Let's Play Activity Cards: Healing play ideas for displaced families in unfamiliar settings.
- Building Bridges, Bridging the Gap Guidebook: Integration tips for refugee and migrant children.

The goal is institutionalisation: systemic change demands accredited, peer-supported, policy-backed structures to protect workforce well-being. As one trainer captured: 'A resilient workforce is not just trained for today's challenges; it is prepared for tomorrow's unknowns.'

To build that workforce, early childhood systems must integrate mental health and self-care into professional pathways, from university training to continuous development. Investing in those who care for young children is not only an ethical imperative, it is the foundation for nurturing safe, inclusive environments where all children can thrive.

THE SPOTLIGHT

This page highlights locally led organisations pioneering innovative approaches to early childhood development in crisis and fragile settings around the world. To nominate a partner for the spotlight, email: comms@movingmindsalliance.org.

Organisation: Cities for Children
Founder: Madeeha Ansari
Location: Pakistan and United Kingdom
Photo: Cities for Children service users

CONTACT

- **Website:** citiesforchildren.co
- **Instagram:** @citiesforchildren
- **Email:** madeeha@citiesforchildren.co

Cities for Children (CfC) has replicated the "Partners in Learning" programme in diverse contexts. Based on a child-to-child model, this programme trains older children to deliver playful early learning sessions to younger children at the preschool stage, in both school and community settings. The younger children, referred to as Little Partners, gain crucial foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Meanwhile, the older children, known as Big Partners, become champions of education and intentionally nurture socioemotional skills such as confidence, empathy, and agency.

Additionally, the "Happy Hoods" programme leverages CfC experience in facilitating community volunteering initiatives. For this effort, a suite of creative learning materials has been developed to reinforce social-emotional learning (SEL) and wellbeing outcomes. These resources are currently being used to support the transition of newly arrived refugee children in the UK.

Organisation: Basmeh & Zeitooneh
Founder: Fady Hallisso
Locations: Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey
Photo: Basmeh & Zeitooneh Team
Contact: contact@basmeh-zeitooneh.org

In 2012, amidst the escalating Syrian crisis, a small group of volunteers in Lebanon came together, moved by the urgent needs of displaced Syrians. What began as a modest relief effort has since evolved into Basmeh & Zeitooneh—a leading refugee-led organisation.

Today, Basmeh & Zeitooneh stands as a beacon of resilience and innovation, empowering both refugees and host communities through a deeply community-rooted approach.

Basmeh & Zeitooneh is more than a service provider—it's a movement led by and for refugees. Their integrated programmes span food security and livelihoods, education, protection, research, and advocacy, ensuring a holistic response to displacement and marginalisation. Their model proves that community-based, refugee-led solutions are not only effective but scalable, offering a blueprint for humanitarian response in protracted crises. Learn more

Alliance Roundup

i) Advancing Play-Based Solutions in Crisis Contexts

In this review period, the Moving Minds Alliance (MMA) proudly joined the global call to action for the International Day of Play (IDoP) 2025. In collaboration with Global Schools Forum, Plan International, BRAC, and World Vision International, our members co-developed a thematic brief, "Building Resilience Through Play: Evidence-Based Approaches for Children in Crisis Settings." This resource highlights effective play-based models from crisis and low-resource environments, emphasising cross-sector collaboration and evidence-based strategies to advance play and resilience in humanitarian contexts. Led by Right to Play, the team also facilitated a panel discussion at the IDoP Virtual Mini Summit.

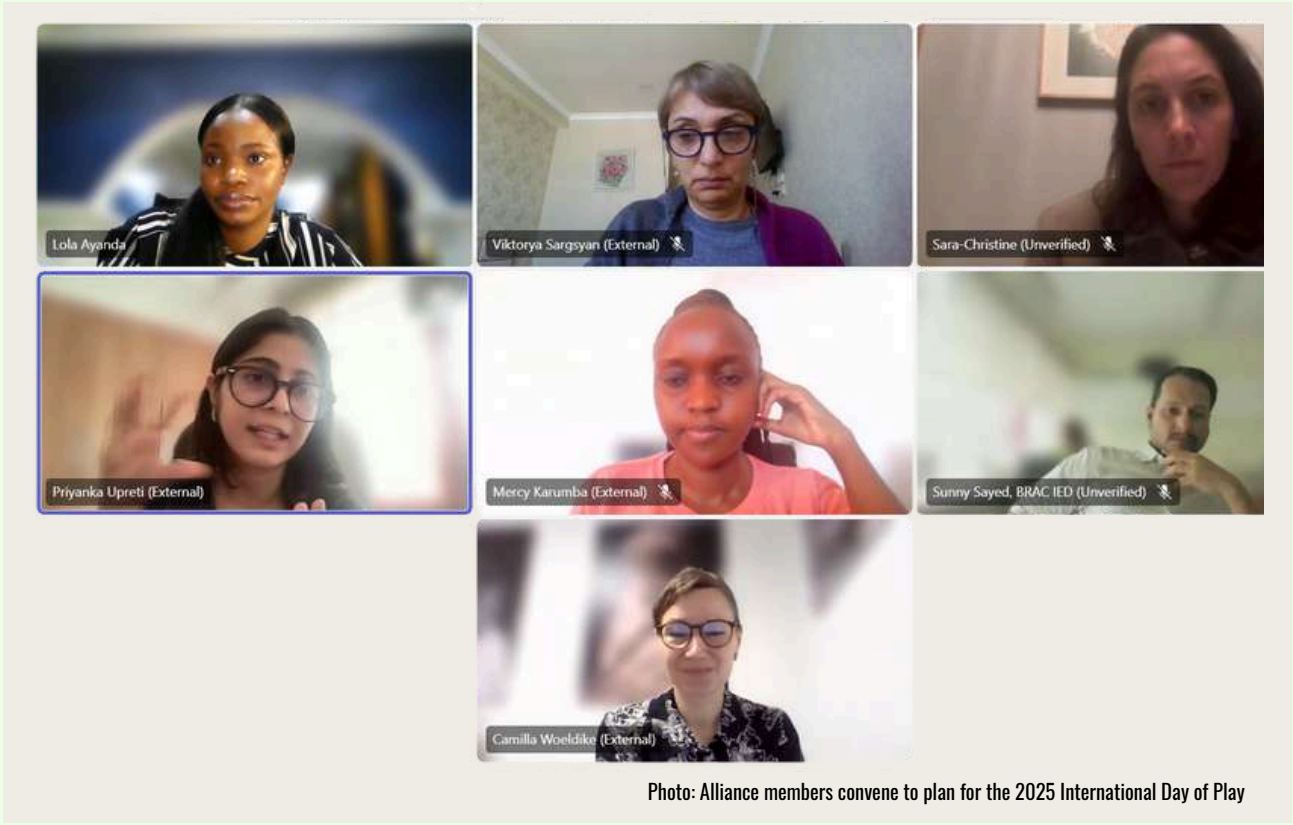

Photo: Alliance members convene to plan for the 2025 International Day of Play

ii) Research Fellowship: Fieldwork Launch

Our ten research Fellows—representing nine countries across three continents—have finalised their research plans and will commence fieldwork in July. This second cohort will explore the intersection of early childhood development, climate change, and mental health, addressing critical knowledge gaps on the impact of crisis and climate emergencies on young children, caregivers, and communities.
Each Fellow is paired with a dedicated Mentor, ensuring robust guidance and support throughout the research process. Our 2025 Mentors and their areas of expertise include:

- Dalia Mostafa: Learning, development & community-based approaches
- Garene Kaloustian: Education & pedagogy amidst crisis
- Grace Obasuyi: Community-based approaches
- Haydeé Nancy Rumaldo Romuacca: Climate change & maternal-child health
- Muneera Abdul Rasheed: Clinical psychology, responsive caregiving & resilience
- Rev. Kigen Kipchirchir Benard: Public policy, advocacy, social protection
- Rodrigo Tadeu Guimaraes Jales: Human rights and social policy
- Shelina Bhamani: Programme development & ECD scaling
- Tafadzwa Chevo: Community resilience-building
- Zuleihat Abdullahi: Climate change, policy & children with disabilities

iii) Expanding Advocacy Through Storytelling

Under the REACH Network initiative, MMA has expanded its knowledge production by engaging local journalists as co-creators of advocacy stories. Following our call for story pitch, ten journalists from crisis-affected low- and middle-income countries will begin producing advocacy narratives starting in July. These stories will explore diverse early childhood development (ECD) themes—including mental health, education, play, gender, disability, nutrition, protection, and caregiving—shedding light on overlooked humanitarian hotspots and championing locally led solutions, from scaling community responses to informing policy through evidence.

iv) Reflecting on Five Years of Advocacy in France

MMA has published a comprehensive report capturing five years of donor-country advocacy in France (2020–2025). Amidst shifting political and fiscal landscapes, the report reflects on our strategies, achievements, and key lessons learned. With France once representing strong alignment on child rights and ODA commitments, this publication offers candid insights into effective advocacy and guidance for future efforts to mobilise domestic resources and strengthen global-local leadership.

v) Fostering Knowledge Exchange

Momentum continues through our two flagship webinar series—Nurturing Futures and the Showcase Series—alongside the launch of our new podcast, Early Evidence. These platforms facilitate knowledge exchange, promote the uptake of evidence, and foster learning. By facilitating dialogue between local and global stakeholders, we ensure that local insights and innovations are recognised and amplified for greater impact (click the links above to catch up on the latest episodes).

Looking Ahead

As we enter the second half of 2025, we look forward to reconnecting with all Alliance members at the annual **MMA Reconnect meeting on July 10**.

The Core Team

UPCOMING ALLIANCE & SECTOR EVENTS

JULY 2025 Reconnect

Thurs, 10th | 01:00 - 02:30pm

Another opportunity for our alliance to come together, reflect, and align our plans for the rest of the year. The overall purpose of MMA Reconnect is to share progress on ongoing initiatives, highlight upcoming events, and explore opportunities for the remainder of the year.

AUG Nurturing Futures 3.0

Thurs, 21st | 01:00 - 02:00pm

This bimonthly webinar features diverse voices discussing strategies to promote equitable, dignified access to holistic nurturing care for young children in crisis.This episode focuses on children with disability in humanitarian settings. REGISTER

SEP MMA Showcase 7.0

Thurs, 4th | 01:00 - 02:00pm

To promote uptake of evidence and learning, this series spotlights sustainable and innovative ECDiE programs, share valuable lessons, and explore opportunities for collaboration. REGISTER

Moving Minds Alliance

ARNEC 2025 Regional Conference on Early Childhood Development
Location: Manila, Philippines
1st- 3rd

GPE Driving transformational change in financing essential public services: The case of education
Location: Sevilla, Spain
1st

Community of Practice (CoP) on Shaping Early Years Education and Development
Location: Zoom
3rd & 17th

6th National ECD Conference: Promoting Transformative Systemic Change in a Child's Ecosystem
By ECD Network for Kenya
Location: Garrisa, Kenya
15th - 17th

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
14th -18th , 21st -23rd

UN Special Day at World Expo 2025 Osaka. This event will highlight the UN's contributions and initiatives at the World Expo | **26th**

World Humanitarian Day (OCHA), **19th**

Advancing Comprehensive Early Childhood Intervention
Location: Lisbon, Portugal
Date: 2nd -5th

UNGA 80
9th-23rd

Quality Early Childhood Development in South Africa: Celebrating three decades of ECD in South Africa
Location: Cape Town
Sept 30th - Oct 2nd

Others Sectoral Events

To list your events in upcoming editions, kindly send an email to : comms@movingmindsalliance.org.

Featured Resources

Right To Play International has recently launched its new policy brief, **Accelerating Foundational Learning Through Play: An Effective Approach to Improving Literacy, Numeracy, and Socio-Emotional Development**. This brief was written in partnership with Unbounded Associates, with support from The LEGO Foundation.

Send feedback to Jennifer Slawich, Director – Policy & Stakeholder Engagement (jslawich@righttoplay.com).

The **Accountability to Children Toolkit** by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action empowers children as active participants in child protection by introducing the Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS) through child-friendly materials and methods. Designed for use in humanitarian settings, the toolkit helps children understand what quality protection looks like and who they can turn to for support, while also guiding practitioners on how to meaningfully involve children in shaping services.

Unlocking Potentials: Enhancing Teacher Certification Pathways for Refugees in East Africa

Published by Save the Children, **this report** explores the qualification profiles of refugee teachers in East Africa, the national and regional policy environment for refugee teachers, and the certification pathways available to them. The report identifies the key challenges to and opportunities for system strengthening to support refugee teacher certification and sets out key recommendations for unlocking the full potential of refugee teachers to thrive as professionals, delivering quality education to children around the world.

Case Study on ECD in Crisis Response in Moldova

The Moving Minds Alliance is pleased to present the **summary** of a case study completed by Dr. Diana Cheianu-Andrei concerning the critical importance of humanitarian coordination for early childhood development in crisis. The study, built on learning from the Ukrainian refugee crisis and the response by the Republic of Moldova, assesses the effectiveness of the response and provides policy recommendations to enhance capacity to support early childhood development during emergencies. A must-read for policymakers, practitioners, and decision-makers.

CLICK LINKS TO READ MORE

OPPORTUNITIES

DEADLINES

July 2, 2025
UNICEF

Consultancy: Statistician/Demographer
UNICEF is seeking a Statistician/Demographer/Epidemiologist based in New York/United States, to support child mortality estimation and analysis.

July 4, 2025
Mastercard Foundation

Head of Impact Labs
The Consultant will lead project implementation across the Impact Labs innovation cycle, from early-stage intake to full adoption and scaling.
Location: Dakar | Addis Ababa | Abuja | Kigali | Accra

July 4, 2025
Water Justice Fund

Movement Building Grants
Supports grassroots movements fighting for water justice. Grants are available for organisations working to ensure equitable access to clean water.

July 6, 2025
Grand Challenges Canada

Senior Manager, Award Management
Join Grand Challenges Canada and play a key role in managing impactful global health projects. Contribute to innovative solutions for pressing challenges.

July 16, 2025
Aga Khan Foundation

Lead Consultant, STRIDES Project Baseline Study
Aga Khan Foundation Canada is seeking an experienced consultant or firm to lead the design, analysis, and reporting for the baseline study.

July 24, 2025
CanWaCH

Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health is seeking its next CEO.

Aug 19, 2025
The Jacobs Foundation

LEVANTE Initiative | Innovative Research Fund
The Jacobs Foundation is inviting researchers worldwide to apply for the LEVANTE (Learning Variability Network Exchange) initiative – Second Cohort. Up to USD 5 million available to support innovative research on children's learning and development across diverse cultures and environments.

September 5, 2025
Cambridge-Africa Research Fund

Cambridge-Africa Research Fund
Funding for collaborative research projects between Cambridge researchers and African partners. The focus is on addressing critical development challenges.

September 17, 2025
Van Leer Foundation

The Good Start Challenge
Innovate for early childhood development! The Van Leer Foundation is seeking creative solutions to improve the lives of young children and their families.

October 6, 2025
Nuffield Foundation

Research, Development and Analysis Fund
Support research that informs social policy. The Nuffield Foundation supports projects that address education, welfare, and social justice.

Rolling Deadline
Moving Minds Alliance

Strategic Consultant for Mobilising Local Financing for ECD in Emergencies
Help mobilise local financing for early childhood development in emergency contexts. Contribute to sustainable solutions for vulnerable children.

Alliance Post

Stay updated. Click icons to connect with us online.

(c): Pixabay

Moving Minds Alliance is a multi-stakeholder alliance advocating for early childhood development in every crisis response, leveraging the strengths of diverse actors from the local to the global.

We invite you to contribute to the next edition. Please contact us at comms@movingmindsalliance.org to share your content or ideas.

Concept and Design: Lola Ayanda