Early Childhood Development in Emergencies

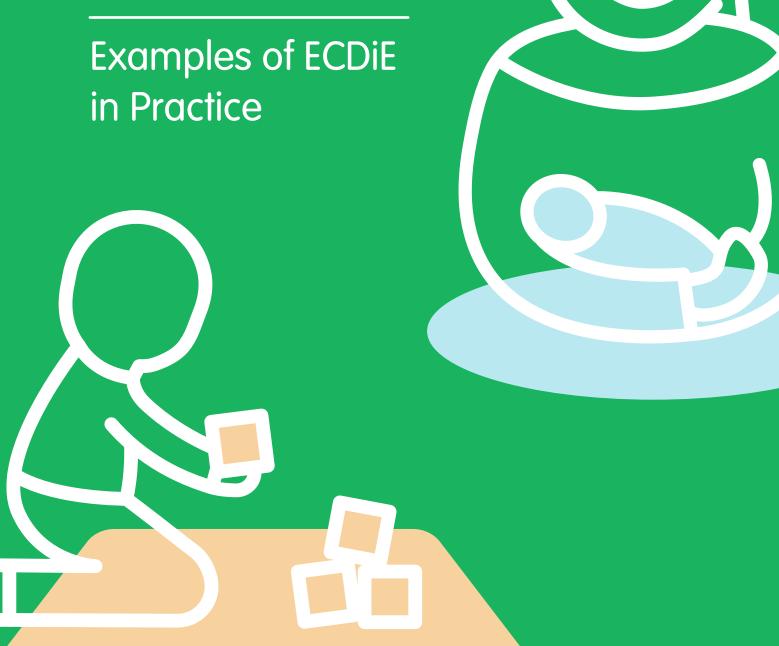## Examples of ECDiE in Practice

Overview

This document provides an introduction to types of early childhood development (ECD) in emergency settings (ECDiE) programs implemented around the world. By no means a comprehensive list, it offers a snapshot of program categories to introduce those not familiar with ECDiE interventions to types of programs that can encourage ECD in humanitarian settings as well as concrete examples of each. We hope this resource can answer the question, "What do ECD programs look like in humanitarian settings?" across a spectrum of complexity and for both caregiver- and child-facing programs. The examples we have chosen come from crisis settings where possible, but sometimes come from non-crisis settings as well. In these cases, we chose examples of programs that we believe would be feasible to adapt and implement in humanitarian and low-resource settings. In addition to the categories of programs included, many additional types of ECD interventions are deeply embedded in one particular sector (such as health or education). We did not include these types of interventions in the following pages in order to focus on holistic, cross-sectoral ECD programs. We want to thank The Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development and the International Rescue Committee for developing the original table and brief from which the categories in this document were adapted, and members of the Moving Minds Alliance for reviewing the document and providing additional program examples.

The Importance of Early Childhood Development in Humanitarian Settings

From birth to age three, the brain grows faster than any other time, laying the foundation for lifelong learning, health, and productivity[1]. But millions of children experience these years in conflict or crisis situations: more than one in six children worldwide lives in an active conflict zone[2]. Substantial evidence shows that prolonged adversity during the critical early years of life can have devastating, long-term effects on health, learning, and behavior[3]. But children are remarkably resilient, and we know that if they have access to quality early childhood development (ECD) support, they can overcome adversity and build a brighter future. Multi-sectoral ECD support for young children and their caregivers can provide significant cognitive, health, educational, and economic returns[4].

What do ECD programs look like in humanitarian settings?

CHILD-FACING PROGRAMS

1. Create **physical or digital materials** to support nurturing care and early learning

- ◄ Early learning kits
- ◄ Mass media content
- ◄ Digital child-facing ECD materials for children and families

2. Create new or support existing **safe and inclusive spaces** where children can grow and learn

- ◄ Safe play and learning spaces
- ◄ Pre-schools/childcare services or child protection services
- ◄ Support to existing child-facing programs

3. Provide **psychosocial support** to children

- ◄ Individual or small group support

PARENT- AND CAREGIVER-FACING PROGRAMS

4. Reach caregivers with **information or key messages** about caregiving

- ◄ Key messages
- ◄ Mass media content

5. Provide caregivers with **direct support** in caregiving practices

- ◄ Parenting support groups
- ◄ Remote interaction with caregivers
- ◄ Intensive individual or small group support
- ◄ Intensive home visiting

6. Provide caregivers with **financial support** to meet essential needs

- ◄ Unconditional or conditional cash transfers

7. Provide **psychosocial support** to caregivers

- ◄ Individual or small group support

CHILD-FACING PROGRAMS

1. Create physical or digital materials to support nurturing care and early learning

1.1 Early learning kits, including culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate local toys, books, and games that can be combined with existing food or non-food item distributions or cash transfer programs

EXAMPLES:

UNICEF's ECD Kit for Emergencies: UNICEF's ECD Kit for Emergencies contains toys and learning materials to support caregivers in fostering a safe educational environment for children ages 0-8. Each kit can provide materials for up to 50 children and comes with a guide for facilitators. More than 7 million children have been reached by the ECD kits globally. Learn more about UNICEF's ECD Kit for Emergencies here, including evaluation results, guides for facilitators, maps of global use, and more.

IRC's "Jugar para Soñar" Backpacks: The IRC's Jugar para Soñar (Play to Dream) backpacks contain toys and play-based learning materials to support caregivers on the move in fostering playful educational moments and nurturing caregiving opportunities for children ages 0-8. Backpacks are distributed to Venezuelan migrant families passing through migratory health and community checkpoints in Colombia. Learn more about the backpacks here.

1.2 **Mass media** content (television, radio, etc.) designed to provide young children with joyful educational media content

EXAMPLES:

Sesame Workshop's *Ahlan Simsim* **TV show**: *Ahlan Simsim* is a joyful educational television show designed for children ages 3-8 across the Middle East. Designed in close collaboration with local producers, creatives, and early childhood development experts, the show features engaging stories that teach children about managing big feelings and support early literacy and numeracy. Learn more about the show here, and access a wide variety of clips from the show on YouTube here.

Ubongo's *Akili and Me* **TV show**: Ubongo is a fun television show designed to provide a holistic early childhood education to children ages 3-6 across sub-Saharan Africa. The cartoon features joyful learning opportunities related to numeracy, pre-literacy, English as a second language, art, and socio-emotional skills. The show reaches 16 million viewers across 17 countries in 11 languages. Research suggests that the shows help children gain literacy and numeracy skills. Learn more about *Akili and Me* here.

IRC's Al Aire con Enrique radio program: The Al Aire con Enrique (On the Air with Harry) radio program is aimed at young migrant children living in Colombia and Venezuela. The content focuses on building children's social-emotional skills and resilience through songs, games, challenges, and other messaging. The radio program emphasizes the unique emotional and cognitive needs of migrant children and the development of skills for resiliency. Learn more about the program here.

1.3 **Digital child-facing ECD materials for children and families**, if possible with free wi-fi to facilitate easier downloading of materials

EXAMPLE:

Sesame Workshop's Jardín Sésamo: Along migrant routes in Latin America, Sesame Workshop provides free access to playful educational content through devices that generate wi-fi for families to use to download fun and educational resources designed for young children. Jardín Sésamo enhances existing services in migrant shelters, child protection spaces, and food distribution centers. Read more about the program here.

2. Create new or support existing safe and inclusive spaces where children can grow and learn

2.1   Safe play and learning spaces, which can be established within existing community buildings, waiting areas, safe and secure outdoor spaces, and other safe places— these can range from low-intensity, self-guided experiences in which children engage (such as in waiting areas) to more intensive childcare settings with trained facilitators

EXAMPLES:

Ahlan Simsim's learning corners: Ahlan Simsim, a partnership between the International Rescue Committee and Sesame Workshop, has created learnning corners for young children in health centers in Jordan. While caregivers are attending health appointments, children can interact with educational games and resources, such as matching games teaching letters, numbers, and emotions. Learn more about the Ahlan Simsim partnership here.

Child Friendly Spaces: Child Friendly Spaces can offer children protection services, psychological support, and informal educational opportunities in humanitarian settings. This type of program offers children activities and support in a safe environment designed for a child's needs in an emergency setting, often in the days or months immediately after a crisis has disrupted their lives. Child friendly spaces are usually created in such a way as to be highly adaptable to the context and rapidly deployed after an emergency. See guidelines for child friendly spaces in emergencies here, and read more about the evidence based on this model here.

2.2   Pre-schools/childcare services or child protection services, which can be established in tents, vacant classrooms, and other safe community spaces where children engage in developmentally appropriate play and learning activities with trained facilitators/teachers

EXAMPLES:

BRAC's Humanitarian Play Labs: The NGO BRAC operates Humanitarian Play Labs for Rohingya refugee children ages 0-6 in Bangladesh. This intervention engages the community in design and extensive feedback to integrate culturally specific games, rhymes, and art as a foundation for play-based educational activities and psychosocial support. The program aims to helps children manage trauma and build resilience. Read more about key features of the model here.

Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development's PrimoHUB program: Step by Step Center set up PrimoHUBs in 11 cities across Romania to serve out-of-school refugee children from Ukraine. PrimoHUBs are an early education service offering children ages 0-6, along with their families, opportunities for play, learning, and development. What services are offered at each location depends on the needs of the community, assessed through the Primokiz methodology, which supports local governments in assessing the needs of communities and improving early childhood services in a participatory and coordinated manner. Romanian language lessons are also offered at the PrimoHUB locations. The Step by Step Center is a founding member of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA). Learn more about the organization here and the Primokiz methodology here.

2.3 Support to existing child-facing programs to integrate additional evidence-based ECD and nurturing care components into their programming, including pedagogy support, teacher training, etc.

EXAMPLES:

Lively Minds' Play Schemes: This program runs a parenting course that trains mothers in rural communities in Ghana to facilitate healthy and educational play. The trainings are specifically designed for mothers who are not literate and have not received a formal education. Then, groups of trained mothers volunteer at local kindergarten classrooms, running play-based stations within existing classrooms that use homemade educational games to encourage healthy development and early learning. Read more about the organization here, and read a summary of a formal evaluation of the program that found positive results on educational and socio-emotional outcomes here.

Instituto Apoyo's Mimate/Mathematics for Everyone program: This program, designed by Instituto Apoyo and the Peruvian Ministry of Education with support from the Inter-American Development Bank, trains teachers in urban and rural preschools in Peru to use an interactive, play-based pedagogy to teach age-appropriate math concepts to children ages 3-5. The new approach provides teachers with training and materials to emphasize the areas of everyday life where math is involved and to encourage reflection and natural interest in math concepts. The program also encourages the development of socio-emotional skills related to learning and developing new relevant skills. See more information about the program here, and see the results of a formal evaluation here, which found that the program improved math skills.

3. Provide psychosocial support to children

3.1 Individual or small group support for children and families experiencing mental health distress or recovering from traumatic experiences, delivered by trained mental health professionals or para-professionals

EXAMPLES:

UNICEF and UNHCR's Blue Dot Hubs: Blue Dot Hubs are safe spaces jointly established by UNICEF and UNHCR that provide information and critical services to children and families along major refugee routes and at border crossings. Among many other services (including safe places to play and sleep, referral services, emergency item distribution, and more), Blue Dot Hubs provide counseling and mental health/psychosocial support via psychological first aid and trained mental health and psychosocial support workers including psychologists and social workers. Read more about the hubs here.

Fundacja Rozwoju Dzieci's Spynka Programs: Fundacja Rozwoju Dzieci is implementing the Spynka program for early childhood development for Ukrainian refugee families in Poland. There are three types of Spynka programs: drop-in centers (located in high-traffic areas where parents may drop their children off), full-day nurseries (for children ages 1-3), and full-day preschools (for children ages 3-6). Each Spynka model provides a safe place for children to learn and play, while providing families with childcare necessary for employment. Psychological services are offered not only to children but also to mothers and Ukrainian refugee teachers. Fundacja Rozwoju Dzieci is a member of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), the ECD network for Europe and Central Asia. Read stories of Spynka participants here.

4. Reach caregivers with information or key messages about caregiving

4.1 **Key messages** focused on responsive caregiving, early learning, and caregivers' mental health, which can be delivered through in-person interactions, telehealth, digital messages, text messages, phone calls, pamphlets, posters, or other media and are often distributed at registration points, distribution centers, health clinics, community centers, or other safe spaces

EXAMPLES:

Sesame Workshop's Sésamo Chatbot: Sesame Workshop's Sésamo Chatbot uses WhatsApp to deliver automated messages to caregivers of young children affected by displacement in Latin America, including messages with early childhood development tips, links to educational videos, activity suggestions, song and storybook attachments, and more. These messages are free and accessible on demand, and they include a focus on socio-emotional learning. For more information on this program, see here.

The Annenberg Institute at Brown University's Tips by Text program: Tips by Text is a text message program based in the United States designed to provide caregivers with easy-to-implement activities to do with their children ages 0-5 to help them develop literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills, as well as information about their child's current stage of development. The program is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Haitian Creole, and Arabic and has been proven effective through several rigorous evaluations. Learn more about the program here, and find implementation guidance here.

IRC's phone-based Gindegi Goron program: In the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, mothers face limited access to information about the health, nutrition, and development of their youngest children. COVID-19 further limited access to this essential support. IRC developed an innovative integrated health, nutrition, and ECD model to provide this information to pregnant and lactating women and their husbands and mother-in-laws remotely through an interactive voice response (IVR) system and phone calls (both pre-recorded and live). A post-intervention assessment suggested that of the mothers who participated, more played with their child, monitored their child's height and weight, and read to their child after the program than before the program. Learn more about the intervention here.

4.2 Mass media content (television, radio, etc.) designed to promote early childhood development through culturally relevant, engaging content designed for adults that may include modeling of responsive caregiving behaviors

EXAMPLE:

Development Media International's ECD campaigns: Development Media International runs evidence-based "edutainment" campaigns (including narrative-based audio and video messages) designed by teams of epidemiologists, media professionals, and behavior change experts and aligned with the Nurturing Care Framework. The dramas are focused on conveying early childhood development and child survival information to caregivers in Tanzania, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Mozambique. They partner with local radio and television stations to disseminate their messages. Learn more about their ECD-focused programs here.

5. Provide caregivers with direct support in caregiving practices

5.1 Parenting support groups that often include a focus on responsive caregiving, early learning, and caregivers' mental health

EXAMPLES:

The Colombian Institute of Family Welfare's Family, Women, and Infancy Program (FAMI): FAMI is a program run by the Colombian Family Welfare Agency for pregnant women, lactating women, and caregivers of children ages 0-2. Local women run weekly caregiver group meetings of 12-15 caregivers to support early childhood development and nurturing care while also linking caregivers to other families with young children. Learn more about the program here.

IRC's Families Make the Difference program: Families Make the Difference is a parenting program for caregivers of young children. The program consists of 10 group-based sessions focused on early brain development, the impact of parenting, empathy and communication, positive discipline, and providing psychosocial support to children. The groups can be led by many different types of community stakeholders and are typically two hours in length, including roleplays and group discussions. A formal evaluation of the program implemented in a remote community in Liberia found that it reduced harsh punishment and improved caregiver-child interactions among participants. More information about Families Make the Difference can be found here.

Right to Play's Play to Grow Parenting model: Play to Grow Parenting is a program that supports parents of children ages 3-6 in fostering social-emotional skills and early literacy and numeracy through responsive parenting and play. Parent educators facilitate 12 bi-weekly instructional sessions and 12 bi-weekly parent support group sessions at a school or in a community center over the course of 6 months, and also conduct 6 monthly home visits throughout the course of the program. Parents learn developmentally appropriate ways to play with their children, strengthen the child-parent bond, and provide discipline. The program was designed to be implemented in development or humanitarian contexts and is currently being piloted in rural, urban, refugee camp, and host community settings in Tanzania and Uganda. Learn more about the program here.

5.2 Remote interaction with caregivers focused on responsive caregiving, early learning, and caregivers' mental health (conversations are two-way, with trained workers answering questions and interacting with caregivers, rather than a one-way transfer of information)

EXAMPLES:

BRAC's phone-based *Pashe Achi*: As part of the Play to Learn project, BRAC implemented a phone-based program called *Pashe Achhi* ("beside you" in Bengali)—a weekly 20-minute phone call delivered by trained facilitators to children and caregivers. *Pashe Achhi* integrated play-based learning approaches with psychosocial support to address issues of heightened anxiety, stress, and isolation during the pandemic. Calls included early childhood development information and support for parents, as well as facilitated games, rhymes, and activities for children. To account for low digital connectivity in Cox's Bazar, BRAC designed this model to allow for implementation with button phones. Read more about this program here.

Ahlan Simsim's Remote Early Learning Program: As part of the Ahlan Simsim partnership between the IRC and Sesame Workshop, IRC implemented a program delivered by teachers to groups of caregivers in Lebanon through calls and WhatsApp messaging. The curriculum integrated multimedia resources teaching children critical pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, cognitive, and social-emotional skills through their caregivers. A rigorous evaluation showed that the program had significant positive impacts on children similar to those seen after a full year of preschool. Learn more about the program here.

5.3 Intensive individual or small group support for adolescent caregivers or caregivers with health issues

EXAMPLES:

USAID's REAL Fathers program: USAID, Save the Children, and the Institute for Reproductive Health partnered to create a program in Uganda for young fathers (16 to 25 years old) who are parenting a child under three years old. Eligible young fathers choose men from their own communities to serve as mentors, who in turn provide the young fathers with advice, guidance, and practical tools for parenting in individual, couple, and group sessions over the course of six months. A rigorous evaluation found that the program reduced violence used with partners as well as harsh punishment of children in the long term, and increased father-child interactions. See more information about the program here.

Mothers to Mothers m2m model: Mothers to Mothers is an NGO that works in 10 countries across sub-Saharan Africa. The mothers2mothers model trains local women living with HIV to work as community health workers (called "mentor mothers") supporting mothers and their young children. Mentor mothers support women living with HIV to start and adhere to treatment throughout pregnancy, provide health service referrals to pregnant women living with HIV, and provide these women with support and advice on early childhood stimulation and responsive and playful parenting, among other ECD services. Read more about the organization's model and its impact here.

5.4 **Intensive home visiting,** often conducted weekly or bi-weekly for at least 6 months, which can include psychosocial support for caregivers, guidance on responsive and playful caregiving, and support for early learning activities, depending on a child's developmental stage and abilities

Pratham's home visiting program: The India-based NGO Pratham tailored a home visiting program based on the original Reach Up and Learn program in Jamaica to the context of informal settlements in urban India. Pratham staff trained local women in the home visit methodology, which included demonstrating play activities with children and coaching mothers through practicing the activities themselves. The trained women then conducted weekly home visits. Read a summary of a formal evaluation of the program here, which found positive impacts on children's learning and a reduction in maternal depression as a result of the program.

Sugira Muryango's home visiting program: This program is a home-visiting model in Rwanda, designed by a partnership between local NGO François-Xavier Bagnoud Rwanda and a combined team at Boston College's Research Program on Children and Adversity and the University of Rwanda. The program aims to reach families living in extreme poverty in Rwanda who have children ages 6-36 months. The program supports playful parenting and improved nutrition, health, and hygiene, also incorporating an emphasis on reducing harsh punishments and engaging both mothers and fathers in caregiving. Read more about the program here, including findings from a study indicating that the program strengthened parent-child relationships, reduced harsh punishments, and improved children's nutrition.

The IRC's Reach Up and Learn program: The IRC tailored a home visiting program based on the original Reach Up and Learn program in Jamaica to the Syrian response region. Trained facilitators conduct weekly or biweekly visits to the homes of families with children ages 6 months to 42 months in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. The visits use a modeling approach in which the facilitator demonstrates positive and playful interactions, then supports the caregiver in having similar positive interactions with their child. Learn more about the program here.

6. Provide caregivers with financial support to meet essential needs

6.1 Unconditional or conditional cash transfers delivered to caregivers with the goal of supporting early childhood development (unconditional cash transfers have no requirements attached to receive the money; conditional cash transfers have requirements that must be met in order to receive the cash, such as children attending health appointments or enrolling in school)

EXAMPLES:

The Government of Niger's "Projet Filets Sociaux": This unconditional cash transfer program run by the government of Niger provided 10,000 (around 20 USD) per month for 24 months to the poorest families within selected villages. Additionally, the program included an 18-month parenting component carried out by local NGOs that consisted of village assemblies, small group sessions, and home visits. These meetings provided caregivers with information on healthy early childhood development practices, such as breastfeeding practices, appropriate punishment, and socio-emotional development of children. The program found positive impacts on caregiver behavior and children's socioemotional development. For more on this program, see here.

Unconditional and conditional cash transfers: Cash transfers have been implemented in many contexts worldwide with varying results. See here for a summary of research on the impacts of cash transfers on school attendance and enrollment, here for a summary of research on the impacts of cash transfers on child health, and here for a summary of research on the impacts of cash transfers on children in health, food security, nutrition, protection, and education. See here for research on combining cash transfer programs with other caregiver support programs. Read stories of families from Yemen, Syria, and Ukraine who have received cash transfers supporting children and families in emergency contexts.

7. Provide psychosocial support to caregivers

7.1 Individual or small group support for caregivers experiencing mental health distress or recovering from traumatic experiences, delivered by trained mental health professionals or para-professionals

EXAMPLE:

Universidad de los Andes's Semillas de Apego program: Healthy bonds between children and their caregivers are essential for healthy early childhood development. In families who have experienced trauma, caregivers may experience mental health challenges, affecting their capacity to provide healthy emotional bonds. The Semillas de Apego program's goal is to foster healthy child-parent attachments, in turn promoting early childhood development for children who have been affected by crisis. The program provides support for caregivers who have been affected by violence in Colombia to process the trauma they have experienced and understand how to overcome these challenges to support their child's early growth. For more information, see here.

A FEW NOTES

A note on the programs included in this document: Information about the programs described here was gathered via desk research of publicly available online resources. Where possible, this information was supplemented with additional information gathered directly from implementing organizations—but this step was not possible for all examples. The programs included are meant to represent a subset of existing program types rather than a comprehensive mapping and are meant to convey the breadth of possibilities and provide illustrations of what existing ECD programs look like across different program types. The examples included here were reviewed by Sesame Workshop and other members of the Moving Minds Alliance for additional insight, but we were not able to independently verify the quality of the programs and inclusion here does not imply endorsement by any reviewing organization.

A note on community engagement: Prioritizing the voices, perspectives, and experiences of the community a program is meant to reach is a vital step in the process of designing, implementing, and evaluating any program. A goal for organizations to work toward is a model in which community members are in decision-making roles and have ownership over programs implemented within their communities rather than just having opportunities to provide input or express needs. Communities should be engaged throughout the full process of a program, from needs assessments to design to implementation to evaluation. We acknowledge that this is a work in progress for many organizations and that it is likely that not all programs included in this document have included community voices to this extent. We encourage continued conversations and dedicated efforts to further engage community members and provide them with opportunities for meaningful and sustained participation in every step of a program's implementation in their community.

Endnotes

1   Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, "InBrief: The Science of Early Childhood Development," 2007.

2   Peace Research Institute Oslo, "Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990-2021," 2022.

3   National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, "The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do," 2007.

4   Nores and Barnett, "Benefits of early childhood interventions across the world: (Under) Investing in the very young," 2010. Gertler, et al., "Labor market returns to an early childhood stimulation intervention in Jamaica," 2014. Black, et al., "Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course," 2016. Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), "Encouraging early childhood stimulation from parents and caregivers to improve child development," 2020. Walker, et al., "Cognitive, psychosocial, and behaviour gains at age 31 years from the Jamaica early childhood stimulation trial," 2021.

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what-we-do/crisis-response