

#NOLOST  
GENERATION

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# EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD)

## The situation and the role of Early Childhood Development **in the context of Syria and Iraq crises**

Early Childhood Development (ECD) services in humanitarian and fragile settings are essential to support young children's healthy development and to drive recovery and peacebuilding. Emergencies arising from armed conflict negatively affect the physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being of children, their families and communities. Children from birth to eight years of age are the most affected by emergencies, with the highest illness and death rates of any age group, twenty times higher than standard levels. Comprehensive evidence from neuroscience to economics shows that when children experience severe, prolonged adversity, they risk having high levels of toxic stress, in which their cortisol hormone levels increase, and their brain architecture is adversely impacted, affecting all subsequent areas of child growth and development<sup>1</sup>

With the additional consideration of the COVID-19 crisis, refugee and other vulnerable<sup>2</sup> children are now experiencing a double emergency<sup>3</sup> as their unique vulnerabilities and risks to their healthy development are further exacerbated. If we ignore the needs of the youngest children now, we risk a generation that is unprepared to enter school, off track for meeting important milestones, and grows up with negative health outcomes—which will impact all of society. At the same time, early quality interventions have the potential to reduce or reverse the negative impacts children in these contexts face. We have a unique window to respond and ensure we set these children up for successful, healthy futures.

1 Richter, L. M., Daelmans, B., Lombardi, J., Heymann, J., Boo, F. L., Behrman, J. R., ... & Bhutta, Z. A. (2017). Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale 3 Investing in the foundation of sustainable development: pathways to scale up for early childhood development. *The Lancet*, 389(10064), 103-118; El Zein, H. L., & Chehab, M. (2015). Young children on the frontline: ECCE in emergency and conflict situations. *Investing against Evidence*, 119.

2 IDP, stateless and returnee children.

3 <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-double-emergency>

No Generation Lost (NLG) partners, are working to ensure a sustainable and context-appropriate ECD response to the needs of millions of Syrian children whose most formative years have been marked by displacement, conflict and violence. An initial mapping of the Syria and Iraq Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) revealed that while progress to support families is underway, the provision of ECD services is only reaching a fraction of the total number of children in need. Considering the need to fill the gaps in programming and funding for ECD within the humanitarian architecture, key actors in the region have sought to improve coordination across the education, health (including nutrition), basic needs, WASH, and protection sectors. In December 2019, NLG partners came together to align with donor representatives, UN agencies and INGOs on ECD evidence, developments, policy as well as programmatic priorities. Outcomes of the briefing<sup>4</sup> included the following:

- a. Policymakers, partners, donors and other stakeholders should support and promote ECD interventions in homes, schools, health clinics, and communities. ECD must be addressed as a humanitarian need but with a long-term development mindset that fosters innovative policy, strategy and action plans.
- b. Investing in creation and strengthening of ECD services, and sustainable programmes will ensure that children’s health, wellbeing, and intellectual and social-emotional development is fulfilled. By prioritizing ECD, there is a greater likelihood of having a long-term effect on economic prosperity, social cohesion, and well-being of their countries.

Right now, there is a critical and cost-effective opportunity to respond. Addressing the “whole child” reduces the need for siloed programming, leading to cost saving measures. To achieve these goals, particularly within the context of COVID constraints and competing needs, the global community must consider the following:

- › National governments and international actors should formulate emergency responses that:
  - Include a strong focus on caregiver wellbeing, responsive caregiving and home-based early learning activities for children ages 0-8, tailored to the child’s age and developmental ability.
  - Incentivize the generation of impact data and evidence on all young children (including refugee, IDP, stateless, returnee and host children) affected by crisis or displacement to better understand what works—as well as how, why, for whom and at what cost—to mitigate long term impacts and in support of better quality and more sustainable ECD programming.

- › Prioritization of financing within national budgets that support the health, development, and wellbeing of children, specifically in humanitarian response appeals. This includes explicitly articulating the need for Early Childhood Development in national humanitarian response plans.
- › Increase donor commitments to meet the developmental needs of children as part of critical response efforts during emergencies, including as part of COVID response efforts.
- › Foster inter-sectoral, inter-agency coordination to ensure that ECD is a core part of the multisectoral response. This includes explicitly articulating the need for Early Childhood Development in global humanitarian response plans.
- › Enable ECD interventions to be weaved into existing programs across sectors. Flexibility is needed to modify project outcomes and adapt project activities, supporting redirection of available resources to emergency programming through existing project platforms where necessary.

## For more information

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