

# Taking Action on the Safety, Well-being, and Development of Children in Conflict/Post Conflict Countries

## Policy Briefing Note



Suna Hanoz-Penney, and the ECPC Programmatic, and Policy and Advocacy Working Groups

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This policy briefing note is prepared by Suna Hanoz-Penney on behalf of the ECPC Programmatic, and Policy and Advocacy Working Groups for the 78<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly High-level Session “Early Childhood Development: Pathways to Sustainable Peace”.

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### *About the ECPC*

The ECPC is a global consortium of United Nations agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, academia, practitioners, and the private sector focused on sharing scientific and practice-based evidence on how investment in early childhood development (ECD) can contribute to sustainable peace, social cohesion, and social justice. We recognize that investing in ECD is a powerful and cost-effective strategy for reducing violence, poverty, and exclusion and for building peaceful societies.

For further information please visit the ECPC website at [ecdpeace.org](http://ecdpeace.org) or write [info@ecdpeace.org](mailto:info@ecdpeace.org).

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Cover photo: Budapest, Hungary - September 2015: Due to ongoing wars and poverty in the Middle East, a wave of refugees have migrated to Europe seeking safe haven. These refugees were in Budapest, Hungary trying to make their way to Germany. ID 100557933 © Brasilnut | Dreamstime.com.

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### Executive Summary

- Humanitarian crises including the war in Ukraine and the ongoing crisis in Syria, among others—pose a substantial threat to children’s health, safety, and development. In addition to the physical threats and psychological traumas posed by war and mass displacement, children in such crises suffer severe deprivation, including lack of adequate nutrition, medicine, education, and clean drinking water. Exposure to such and resulting toxic stress leads to significant harm for children’s short- and long-term health and well-being.
- Early child development (ECD) interventions are critical to addressing these threats globally. Growing evidence suggests appropriate ECD programming, supported by psychological first aid and psychosocial support, can mitigate harms to young children and families living in contexts of war, displacement, and other humanitarian crises. Yet, it is disturbing that neither integrated ECD interventions, nor early care and learning for children more generally, have been prioritized by governments and agencies in emergency contexts.
- Governments, donors, organizations, and other international actors must act now to uphold international commitments to prioritize the rights of children and ensure adequate funding and support for all children in crisis. The ECD research and practitioner community must also act with urgency to strengthen the case for ECD interventions in emergencies, including employing more effective communications and addressing research gaps. Frontline workers, including families, should be empowered with the knowledge and tools to support the holistic development of children, especially in situations of conflict and crisis.
- We urge governments, donors, organizations, and other international actors to prioritize integrated ECD interventions inclusive of early learning and early care in emergencies.

### Recommendations Overview

- Governments, donors, and other international actors must respond with urgency to revive the importance of equity in humanitarian response. This involves abiding by commitments to the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UNHCR’s shift in educational strategy in 2012, and the UNHCR’s 2019 Global

Framework, emerging from the Global Compact on Refugees of 2018.<sup>1</sup> This includes prioritizing integration of refugee children into host nation education systems and protecting and caring for refugee children and families while ensuring adequate funding to meet the basic immediate and developmental needs of *all* children – including and especially those in crisis.

- Organizations implementing early childhood development (ECD) interventions and researchers must build a more compelling case for ECD programming and evaluation in emergencies and crises. These stakeholders need to communicate existing examples and cases of effective ECD programs and implementation models more effectively and intentionally. Donors need to fund research so that existing gaps in what works (or what does not) are filled adding to increased understanding of the effectiveness and benefits of ECD programs in emergencies and crises. This needs to be a growing and significant priority. Frontline workers, including families, should receive capacity building and psychosocial support to increase their knowledge and empower them with tools to better support the holistic development of children pre-, during, and post conflict.

## Threats to Children in War and Conflict

Humanitarian crises—like the war in Ukraine—pose a substantial threat to children’s health, safety, and development.<sup>2</sup> The violent conflict in Ukraine and the humanitarian crisis it has unleashed in the country and across Europe is a salient example of this harm. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has stated that the Ukraine war could become Europe’s “worst humanitarian and refugee crisis in decades, with the numbers of refugees and internally displaced multiplying by the minute.”<sup>3</sup> Before the present crisis began, 2.9 million people in Ukraine were already in need of humanitarian assistance, including the *Roma* and other minorities, and more than 750 educational facilities had been damaged due to violent conflict in 2014. At present, the United Nations estimates that 12 million people inside Ukraine will need relief and protection, while more than 4 million refugees will need protection and assistance in neighboring countries in the coming months.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children. UNHCR. (2012). *Education strategy 2012-2016*. Geneva: Author; UNHCR. 2019. *Global framework for refugee education*.

<sup>2</sup> Black, M.M., S.P. Walker, L.C.H. Fernald, *et al.* (2017). Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course. *Lancet* **389**: 77–90; Murphy, K.M., Yoshikawa, H. and Wuermli, A.J. (2018), Implementation research for early childhood development programming in humanitarian contexts. *Ann. N.Y. Acad. Sci.*, 1419: 90-101. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.13691>

<sup>3</sup> UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Special Session on Ukraine, February 28, 2022

Children are disproportionately impacted by complex humanitarian emergencies, as disruptions and deprivation in their surrounding environment directly affects their development.<sup>4</sup> Not only do these disruptions directly affect young children but also the health and well-being of their parents and caregivers which creates a compounding negative effect on development. The Ukraine crisis will surely be no different. For example, many Ukrainian children have been separated from their fathers and other close family members, as the government has mandated that fathers, brothers, and even grandfathers remain in Ukraine to defend their countries. Many families have also been forced to flee their homes. Some parents face the impossible or no-win choice: to keep their children at risk of war or to send them *alone* to the border. This in turn has made children more vulnerable to being trafficked and exploited. In a recent press release, UNICEF issued a warning of both the internal and transnational exploitation of children fleeing the violence for the commercial sex trade, forced begging, and involuntary servitude. In addition to the physical threats posed by war and displacement, the conflict will likely also be a psychological disaster for children and their caregivers, many of whom are already showing severe signs of emotional distress and neurological distortion due to repeated exposures to toxic stress and traumatic family separation. Research indicates that repeated and continuing toxic stress exposures can have lifelong and generational implications for learning, behavior, and health.<sup>5</sup> One example is that conflict could impact children's understanding not only of "peace" but also their coping mechanisms and conflict resolution approach towards people perceived as "other".<sup>6</sup> This affects not just individual children but future generations, the resilience of their communities, and their culture of peace.

However, the conflict in Ukraine is just one of many humanitarian crises in the world today. These include but are not limited to crises in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Colombia, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Lebanon, Myanmar, Palestine, Syria, Venezuela, Yemen, and so many others, including the United States of America's southern border with Mexico. In each of these locations, the basic needs of many of the children are not being met. UNICEF estimates from 2018 show that more than one in five babies are born into and start their lives in conflict and crisis.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, these conflicts have a negative impact on the economic

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<sup>4</sup> Richter L, Dawes A, de Kadt J. (2010). Early Childhood – Promoting Mental Health. In *Scarce-Resource Contexts: Emerging Evidence and Practice* (Petersen I, Bhana A, Flisher AJ, Swartz L, Richter L, eds., 2010, HSRC Press); Irwin, L. G., Siddiqi, A., & Hertzman, G. (2007). *Early child development: a powerful equalizer* (Vancouver, BC: Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP)).

<sup>5</sup> Ataullahjan, Samara, Betancourt, & Bhutta (2020). Mitigating toxic stress in children affected by conflict and displacement. *BMJ*; Shonkoff *et al.* (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*.

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Schwebel, M. (2001). Promoting the culture of peace in children. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 7(1), 1-3.; Leckman, J. F., Panter-Brick, C., & Salah, R. (Eds.). (2014). *Pathways to peace: The transformative power of children and families* (Vol. 15). MIT Press.

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF. 2018. "29 million babies born into conflict in 2018" *Press Release*. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/29-million-babies-born-conflict-2018>

well-being of families and societies all around the world. These crises therefore need worldwide, consolidated and integrated solutions.

## The Critical Need for ECD in Emergencies

The future of an entire generation of children is at risk and early childhood development (ECD) interventions are proving to be critical to global efforts to address these threats. Growing evidence suggests ECD programming can mitigate harms to young children and families living in war, displacement, and other humanitarian contexts.<sup>8</sup> Yet, neither ECD interventions, nor early learning and care for children more generally, have been prioritized by governments and agencies in emergencies and humanitarian contexts.<sup>9</sup> Often, less than 20% of funds are allocated to early learning and care. Available funding is inadequate to ensure that the basic and developmental needs of these children are met. Part of the challenge is a serious dearth of research and insight as to the benefits, both long term and short term, of ECD interventions in emergencies, and a lack of awareness as to existing research and successful programs. Governments, donors, organizations, and other international actors must take steps *now* to ensure adequate support for ECD programming for children in emergencies and promote greater understanding of ECD interventions to mitigate harm as well as the research and communication resources needed to promote these efforts.

Frontline responders interacting with children during, and post-crises often include psychologists, social workers, teachers, and especially mothers or other caregivers. However, they often lack knowledge on ECD and feel ill prepared to support children. In addition, where formal education and social services are not, or no longer possible due to crises, a large burden falls on parents or caregivers for both the basic and developmental needs of their children. A child's immediate environment i.e., their parents or caregivers have a large impact on shaping a child's understanding of conflict and war and their overall development. They are key to promote a culture of peace at home, however, lack the support and tools to confidently do so. Empowering frontline workers to provide ECD and peace education has the potential to build social cohesion and resilience in future generations and communities. Further focus also needs to be placed on providing services and support to fathers specifically. This support should aim to empower them with the necessary skills to be active participants in their children's development in ways that are meaningful to them. Services targeting

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<sup>8</sup> Murphy, Yoshikawa, & Wuermli, (2018: 90)

<sup>9</sup> Moving Minds Alliance. 2021. *Early childhood development in humanitarian standards and guidance documents*. Report. Retrieved from: [https://movingmindsalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/mma-ecdie\\_standards\\_and\\_guidance.pdf](https://movingmindsalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/mma-ecdie_standards_and_guidance.pdf); Murphy, Yoshikawa, & Wuermli, (2018: 90).

children are often primarily directed towards and designed for mothers, reinforcing existing burdens on mothers, and downplaying the integral support which fathers offer to their children and families

## Global Examples of ECD Interventions in Emergencies

If we are to build genuine peace in our world, we must protect and support children and work together towards rights fulfillment, equity, embracing diversity, and social justice for and among our children. To do so, children's early years (prenatal to age 8) have to be supported through contextually-relevant and integrated ECD interventions and programming because they target the most critical window of development as well as the child's surrounding environment. ECD interventions and programs can help support the child's critical needs for safety, health, and learning opportunities in these dire contexts as well as the health and well-being of their parents and caregivers.<sup>10</sup> The many benefits of ECD interventions have been demonstrated in successful projects around the world.

### Northern Ireland – The Early Years' Media Initiative for Children Respecting Difference Programme

The Media Initiative For Children (MIFC) Respecting Difference Programme, developed by the Early Years organization in Northern Ireland, provides an excellent example of a successful ECD intervention in an emergency context. Through this ECD programme, the Early Years organization has helped foster a broader culture of respect for diversity and difference among young children, teachers, and families, in the contexts of society traumatized by 30 years of divisive conflict.<sup>11</sup> Research published in 2001 demonstrated that young children—as young as age three—in Northern Ireland were developing negative and prejudicial beliefs and attitudes about other groups, and by age six, those attitudes were becoming entrenched.<sup>12</sup> These findings challenged, among other things, the predominant belief at the time that young children were too young to notice the sectarian divisions that surrounded them, and were thus unaffected by them. In fact, they were being deeply affected. Furthermore, the findings proved to be watershed moment leading to critical changes in ECD policy and programming.

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<sup>10</sup> Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 'Key Concepts: Brain architecture'. <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/keyconcepts/toxic-stress/>

<sup>11</sup> Fitzpatrick, Siobhan. (2023). "Developing a Culture of Respecting Difference with Young Children, Their Families, and Communities in Northern Ireland". In *Foundations for a Peaceful World: The Transformative Power of Early Childhood Education to Promote Peace and Social Cohesion* (Feder, Joshua, Fitzpatrick, Siobhan & Ziv, Margalit, eds., 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Connolly, P., Smith, A., & Kelly, B. (2002). Too young to notice. *The cultural and political awareness of*, 3-6.

In response, Early Years developed the Media Initiative For Children (MIFC) Respecting Difference Programme—in coordination with the Peace Initiatives Institute (PII) from Colorado, U.S.A.—and implemented it across the ECD sector in Northern Ireland, Ireland, and beyond.<sup>13</sup> As ethnic and religious differences were the foundation of the conflict in Northern Ireland, the programme aimed to promote a culture between children, parents, teachers, and broader community that respected and celebrated difference and diversity, including embracing new forms of diversity—race, disability, and gender—and discouraging bullying and cruelty.<sup>14</sup> Rigorous independent research and evaluation has demonstrated this ECD programme’s effectiveness, having a significant impact on young children’s social and emotional development, promoting a culture of inclusion and respecting difference, while also positively impacting public policy on early education.<sup>15</sup>

### Serbia – Pomoc Deci’s “Media Initiative” Inspired ECD Programming

The approach to ECD programs and services developed by Pomoc Deci – Children and Youth Support Organisation in Serbia, inspired by the “Media Initiative” by Early Years in Northern Ireland, are another example of a successful ECD interventions in crisis context that helps promote social cohesion and peace. The Yugoslav wars—a series of ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and insurrections—led to the migration of 750,000 refugees to Serbia from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosova and Metohija, fomented significant polarization between ethnic and religious groups in the country.<sup>16</sup> With ethnic and other forms of societal divisions central to these conflicts, Pomoc Deci, an organization founded in Serbia in the years following the wars, with a mission to create an environment of hope and respect for children and youth, set out to address these challenges. Inspired by the Early Years’ Respecting Difference Programme in Northern Ireland, Pomoc Deci developed a new approach to ECD programs and services in the country focused on promoting a culture of respect for difference in Serbian society. As a part of this approach, the organization developed and implemented a four-year ECD programme focused on promoting the active development of respect for difference and diversity in Serbian society.<sup>17</sup> Rigorous evaluations demonstrated that the programme changed perceptions among teachers as to the extent to which children notice differences in others, and exclude other

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<sup>13</sup> Fitzpatrick (2023).

<sup>14</sup> Fitzpatrick (2023).

<sup>15</sup> Fitzpatrick (2023).

<sup>16</sup> Vasic, Ljiljana. (2023). “Active Development of Respect for Diversity from Early Years in Serbia and Western Balkans”. In *Foundations for a Peaceful World: The Transformative Power of Early Childhood Education to Promote Peace and Social Cohesion* (Feder, Joshua, Fitzpatrick, Siobhan & Ziv, Margalit, eds., 2023).

<sup>17</sup> Vasic (2023).



children, motivating teachers to work with children and parents to encourage acceptance and respect for difference. The results also led to important policy changes by the Serbian Ministry of Education to support efforts to promote respect for difference.<sup>18</sup>

### Türkiye – AÇEV’s Earthquake Relief Efforts and Syrian Refugee Preschool Education Intervention

Two powerful earthquakes struck Türkiye and Syria on February 6, 2023, followed by more than 6,000 aftershocks that devastated eleven Turkish provinces, including cities Adana, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaras, Malatya, and Sanliurfa. In north-west Syria, the Lattakia Governorates and cities Aleppo, Hama, and Idleb were also severely damaged.<sup>3</sup> As of early March 2023, the combined death toll in Türkiye and Syria is reported to have exceeded 50,000 people. Recent appeals issued by UNICEF report that at least 9.1 million people in Türkiye are left in need including 2.5 million children, and in Syria at least 5.4 million people are in need including 2.6 million children.

In all these regions, AÇEV, Turkish’s leading education NGO, is uniquely positioned to address the needs of children and families who have been displaced by the February 2023 earthquakes through the “Nurturing Care” framework. The comprehensive model includes children having access to essential quality nutrition, protection, and early learning services key to reaching their potential while their parents and caregivers are supported in nurturing care practices via parenting programs. Center activities include: Accelerated School Readiness Program and Children’s Play Groups; Parent Support Programs and Post-Trauma Support Groups for Responsive Caregiving; AÇEV also designed ECD play boxes to help caregivers to meet the needs of young children during such emergencies and re-focus their attention on the children and their development. These kits are just the first step in aiming to build a bridge from emergency to normalcy. ECD kits are delivered to children and parents affected by the earthquake through our centers, and POWER Program for Young Women.

Before the earthquake relief efforts, AÇEV had already been employing ECD interventions to promote social cohesion and peace in response to another crisis: The war in Syria. The has led to a catastrophic refugee crisis, affecting more than 13.1 million Syrians, and at least 5 million children.<sup>19</sup> Türkiye hosts the most

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<sup>18</sup> Vasic (2023).

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF (2018), Syria Crisis Mid-Year 2018 Humanitarian Results, <https://www.unicef.org/media/77296/file/Syria-Crisis-SitRep-Mid-Year-2018.pdf>; Alsayed, A., Wildes, V.J. Syrian Refugee Children: A Study of Strengths and Difficulties. *J. Hum. Rights Soc. Work* **3**, 81–88 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-018-0057-4>; UNHCR, Syrian Emergency, (2020) <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>

substantial number of Syrian refugees of any country, with more than 4 million as of 2019, including 1.7 million children.<sup>20</sup> The Syrian refugee crisis is thus a children's crisis, with young children disproportionately impacted, suffering severe deprivation and physical and psychological trauma, impacting their long term health, developmental potential, and well-being.<sup>21</sup>

AÇEV adapted its accelerated school readiness program to address the needs of Syrian refugee children through preschool education. The 10-week long program was designed to ensure five to six years old refugee children continue on their educational path in the formal Turkish primary school system and are better prepared developmentally and culturally when they start school. The intervention, which aims to strengthen families, build resilience, and foster a supportive environment for young refugee children's development and well-being, is based on ECD programming that has been proven to increase school enrolment rates and success, with children more prepared linguistically, socially, and cognitively, and better supported by their parents throughout their development. This ECD intervention targeting Syrian refugee children and families has been successfully implemented in Istanbul and in the South Eastern provinces of Türkiye in collaboration with the Southeastern Administration, Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education, and international sponsoring partners, including Siemens and Plan International.

### Palestine – Gaza Community Mental Health Program

The Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) offers another example of a critical ECD intervention in an emergency/humanitarian crisis context. Palestinian children have been affected by war, occupation, and conflict for over 75 years. In Gaza, for instance, a child of twelve years of age will have lived through six major conflicts, and if lucky enough to survive would very likely suffer from severe deprivation, including loss of caregivers and access to basic services like health and ECD services.<sup>22</sup> Such deprivation and exposure to violence has caused serious mental and psychological health challenges for children and families—a child in Gaza would today likely exhibit clear signs of toxic stress due to these circumstances,

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<sup>20</sup> UNICEF (2019), Turkey Humanitarian Situation Report #29, <https://www.unicef.org/media/81816/file/Turkey-SitRep-January-2019.pdf>; Alsayed & Wildes (2018: 81)

<sup>21</sup> Mollica, R. F., Cardozo, B. L., Osofsky, H. J., Raphael, B., Ager, A., & Salama, P. (2004). Mental health in complex emergencies. *The Lancet*, 364 (9450), 2058-2067; Saltzman, W. R., Layne, C. M., Steinberg, A. M., Arslanagic, B., & Pynoos, R. S. (2003). Developing a culturally and ecologically sound intervention program for youth exposed to war and terrorism. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 12(2), 319-342.

<sup>22</sup> Shaar, Ali. (2023). "Stories, Actions, and Aspirations: Efforts to Help Palestinian Children Impacted by Conflict". In *Foundations for a Peaceful World: The Transformative Power of Early Childhood Education to Promote Peace and Social Cohesion* (Feder, Joshua, Fitzpatrick, Siobhan & Ziv, Margalit, eds., 2023).

including suffering high levels of depression and PTSD,<sup>23</sup> with little hope for peace, prosperity, and happiness in the long term.<sup>24</sup> Governmental, non-governmental, and international agencies have implemented various interventions to address these dire challenges, including programs aimed at addressing lack of access to ECD services.<sup>25</sup>

The GCMHP is one such example, which involved the training of more than 200 mental health professionals to provide Psychological First Aid (PFA), basic counseling techniques, and on detection and referral of cases in need for further support—including early detection of cases requiring additional ECD services and support. The GCMHP aims to improve coping, support healing, and build resilience, and over the long term, greater social cohesion and peace. It has proven to be a critical safeguard to Palestinian children, especially those in Gaza.<sup>26</sup>

### Colombia – International Center for Education and Human Development<sup>27</sup>

Colombia offers another example of initiative involving ECD programming and services in an emergency context designed to promote social cohesion and peace. Colombia has suffered violence and social decline due to 60 years of armed conflict. A critical effort to help affected children and families was The International Center for Education and Human Development's (CINDE) proposal to invest in the relationship between early childhood, armed conflict, and peace building. CINDE has led multiple ECD-focused peacebuilding initiatives, including designating schools as territories of peace; the protection of ECD services in affected indigenous communities; and contributions to the Educators and Citizenship Wisdom Mission and the Special Jurisdiction of Peace reports. CINDE's efforts have led to positive ECD programmatic and policy changes that protect children's rights and ensured the continuous inclusion of children and adolescents in peacebuilding and broader social development in the country.

### Nepal – Children as Zone of Peace Campaign

Nepal has faced multiple significant emergencies and crises, including a decade-long armed conflict; devastating earthquakes; negative climate change impacts; unique COVID-19 pandemic challenges; and long-

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<sup>23</sup> Save the Children, 2022

<sup>24</sup> DCI, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Shaar (2023).

<sup>26</sup> Shaar (2023).

<sup>27</sup> Based on a draft paper: Acosta, Alejandro. (2023). "Colombia, ECD, and Peace" (forthcoming).

term political and economic instability. Among the various initiatives undertaken to help affected children and families, the Children as Zone of Peace National Campaign (CZOP)'s the ECD interventions have been among the most successful. The CZOP started as a loose coalition in 2001 and today has 71 member organisations working to promote children's rights, with all seven provinces in Nepal represented.<sup>28</sup> This national campaign focused on ECD policy and services has helped lead to the formation of a national ECD caucus; national ECD consortium, and the Alliance for ECD Nepal—which have all helped support and encourage critical public and private sector ECD efforts in the country—and most notably, has successfully advocated for constitutional protections for ECD rights in 2015—the Constitution of Nepal now codifies ECD rights, guaranteeing children's access to health, nutrition, education, and care. Such fundamental protection for ECD services and access was a major ECD milestone for Nepal and for ECD globally.<sup>29</sup> These efforts have led governments at every level in Nepal invest in and support ECD services and access, including a recently launched a “school nurse program,” assigning qualified health workers/nurses to schools and ECD centers to provide students with specialized care and health service. These ECD programs and efforts have proved successful in responding to the needs of children affected by violence, natural disasters, and other incidents.<sup>30</sup> This, in turn, no doubt fosters social cohesion and peace over the long term in the country.

### Lebanon – The Successes of IDEA / FIKRA

Lebanon has experienced decades of civil war and conflict among competing religious and ethnic groups. More recently, it has also dealt with an influx of over 1.5 million refugees due to the Syrian war. These conditions have had profoundly negative impacts on young children and families in the country and caused tensions among different ethnic and religious groups. Various ECD efforts have been undertaken to address these challenges, with the International Development and Empowerment Association (IDEA /FIKRA), a Lebanese NGO founded in 2010, taking the lead on key initiatives.<sup>31</sup> IDEA promotes human rights with a special focus on children rights, and has long advocated for ECD and peacebuilding. One successful such ECD intervention designed and implemented by IDEA focused “Capacity building”, “Awareness”, and

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<sup>28</sup> Shrestha, Kishor. (2023). “A Journey from Children as Zone of Peace (CZOP) Campaign to Constitutional Rights to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Nepal”. In *Foundations for a Peaceful World: The Transformative Power of Early Childhood Education to Promote Peace and Social Cohesion* (Feder, Joshua, Fitzpatrick, Siobhan & Ziv, Margalit, eds., 2023).

<sup>29</sup> Shrestha (2023).

<sup>30</sup> Shrestha (2023).

<sup>31</sup> Hamaoui, Linda. (2023). “Peacebuilding in Early Childhood: Vision, Challenges, and Hopes”. In *Foundations for a Peaceful World: The Transformative Power of Early Childhood Education to Promote Peace and Social Cohesion* (Feder, Joshua, Fitzpatrick, Siobhan & Ziv, Margalit, eds., 2023).

“Advocacy” and was designed to increase social cohesion and social stability among Lebanese and non-Lebanese youth, including children with special needs.<sup>32</sup> It did so by promoting the right of children to participation, inclusion, and non-discrimination, and indirectly, social cohesion, by bringing together participants from the two groups together. Evaluations demonstrate that the project increased social cohesion between youth, parents, and facilitators in each of these communities, also established inclusive activities for children with special needs. The program this promoted a culture of participation, acceptance, and social cohesion—critical to long term peace.<sup>33</sup>

## Recommendations for Policy and Practice

- Governments, donors, and other international actors must respond with urgency to revive the importance of equity in humanitarian response. This includes:
  - Upholding commitments to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes a duty of care and protection for children and families seeking refuge in neighboring countries, as Ukrainian families are doing today, and for those who are fleeing from other conflict zones regardless of their nationality, race, gender, or religious views.
  - Ensuring adequate funding to meet the basic developmental needs of all children in crisis. To reach their full potential, children need the five inter-related and indivisible components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving, and quality opportunities for learning.
- Early childhood development (ECD) interventions implementing organizations and researchers must build a more compelling case for ECD programming in emergencies, including:
  - Communicate existing examples and cases of effective ECD programs and implementation models in emergencies more effectively and intentionally, for greater uptake in practice.
  - Fund research in order to fill existing gaps in what works (or what does not) and understanding on not only what ECD programs are effective in emergencies crisis, but also how and why an ECD intervention is effective in one setting, population, or context. They must also build systematic and

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<sup>32</sup> Hamaoui (2023).

<sup>33</sup> Hamaoui (2023).

standardized mechanisms to monitor and evaluate ECD programming in crises for greater uptake in practice.

- Build the capacity of frontline workers such as psychologists, parents or caregivers, teachers and social workers to support children's ECD and provide peace education to ensure a sustainable ECD support system for children pre-, during and post crisis.

## Conclusion

Safeguarding young children impacted by the current crisis and prioritizing their survival, development, and protection is necessary to alleviate suffering and uphold their rights. It will also safeguard our future. If we take action now, these children will help drive future economic recovery and build a strong foundation for peace and security, resilience, social justice, and social cohesion. As stated in the United Nations resolution on The Culture of Peace (UN Resolution A/RES/74/21), *a vital role in the promotion of a culture of peace belongs to parents, teachers, politicians, journalists, religious organizations,...as well as those engaged in clinical, scientific, philosophical and creative and artistic activities.*

The scientific evidence is growing as to the necessity of effectiveness of ECD interventions in contexts of war, displacement, and humanitarian crises. However, governments, donors, organizations, agencies, and other international actors around the world, along with the global ECD research and practitioner community, need to take action urgently. Increasing investment in early childhood care and development *for every child* is a vital necessity for building a peaceful and sustainable future for children from Ukraine, children in other wars and conflicts, and ALL children around the world.