

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PEACE CONSORTIUM

September, 2025

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PEACE:
A STRATEGIC AGENDA
FOR GLOBAL ACTION

*Policymakers, practitioners,
and researchers worldwide must act
with far greater urgency to address
the grave violations committed against
children in conflict-affected settings.*



ecdpeace.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC)** embeds early childhood development (ECD) in peacebuilding efforts to help realize the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Children and families in fragile and conflict-affected settings face profound risks to their health, development, and wellbeing. Scientific evidence shows that nurturing care and supportive environments in early childhood have lasting impacts on both individuals and societies. Yet global investment in this foundational period remains inadequate.

We call for urgent global action to prioritize the evidence: investment in ECD and trauma-informed parenting programs can interrupt intergenerational cycles of violence and build sustainable peace.

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PEACE CONSORTIUM

The Early Childhood Peace Consortium is a global consortium of civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, researchers, practitioners, youth, and the private sector, alongside United Nations agencies.

We call on world leaders and practitioners to recognize that investing in early childhood development is one of the most cost-effective strategies to reduce violence, poverty, and social exclusion – and to build a culture of peace.

Our mission is to catalyze global action to recognize and prioritize ECD as a foundation for sustainable peace. We do this by advancing the evidence, sharing successful and proven practices, and building multi-stakeholder partnerships to translate knowledge into action.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

War and forced displacement pose grave threats to healthy development.¹ Many children face trauma, abduction, separation from their families, attacks on schools, and denial of humanitarian aid. Scientific evidence shows that such violence has lasting, intergenerational consequences: for example, war trauma can affect the biology of pregnant women, their children, and even grandchildren unborn at the time of conflict.²

At the same time, early childhood interventions have demonstrated long-term benefits.³ Evidence from Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Ireland, Côte d'Ivoire, Lebanon, Rwanda, Palestine, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Türkiye shows that

holistic ECD programs can reduce trauma, foster empathy and emotion regulation, and strengthen social relationships within families and communities. In conflict settings, these programs reduce violence, foster empathy, and increase responsive caregiving – shifting how communities address violence and build peace.

Despite this evidence, ECD remains underprioritized by policymakers at all levels. There is a critical need to translate scientific knowledge into effective action: to invest in translational research and cross-sectoral partnerships that embed ECD in peacebuilding. Homes are where intergenerational peace begins or unravels.

Our work is grounded in three key areas of evidence-based practice:

1. **Early development results:** High-quality programs in the first three years of life improve children’s learning, psychosocial health, and lifelong opportunities. ECD is a transformative foundation recognized in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.⁴
2. **Family and community engagement:** Effective interventions go beyond the individual child. Supporting families – mothers, fathers, and other caregivers – reduces parenting stress, improves family wellbeing, and enhances child outcomes. Engaging communities to sustain program delivery is also essential for successful implementation.
3. **Systems and partnerships:** Sustained impact requires engaged stakeholders, supportive policies, reliable funding, and scalable programs. A new generation of research and innovation is needed to overcome structural and societal barriers. Countries like Colombia and Nepal have already embedded ECD into national peacebuilding strategies.

Our desired outcomes include:

1. **Evidence-to-policy translation:** Strengthening evidence-to-policy translation through high-level dialogues and UN member state commitments
2. **Effective implementation:** Scaling up ECD as a priority in national and international peacebuilding frameworks
3. **Capacity building for next-generation leadership:** Training youth and emerging leaders to champion intergenerational peacebuilding, by anchoring ECPC as a global knowledge hub



Read the full ECPC Five-year Strategic Plan

<https://ecdpeace.org/ecpc-strategic-plan>

Call to Action

Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers worldwide must act with far greater urgency to address the grave violations committed against children in conflict-affected settings. We must build a better future for the next generation – grounded in United Nations resolutions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Sustainable Development Goals – while drawing on scientific evidence.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the last 10 years, violations of children’s rights in conflict areas have been on the rise, and conflicts are increasing, reversing a post-World War II trend.⁵ The statistics are not just numbers; they represent deaths, destroyed childhoods, shattered families, and compromised futures. This negative trend often takes place with blatant disregard for humanitarian protection laws and systems. At the same time, funding for humanitarian aid and for child- and family-focused programs has faced severe cuts, affecting also ECPC members.

To address these challenges, we must ensure adequate investment, integrated systems of support, and coordination between public and private actors. A nurturing care framework – encompassing health, nutrition, safety, responsive caregiving, and early learning opportunities – is essential to ensure that children can recover, thrive, and contribute to long-term peace and stability.

The ECPC is undergoing a strategic transformation to meet this moment as an opportunity. As a knowledge-to-action network with a decade of successful experience, we are actively seeking partners and sponsors to embed ECD into peacebuilding efforts over the next five years.

“ We stand in solidarity and collaborate with the UN Secretary-General, UNICEF, WHO and all other United Nations Agencies, as well as with Governments, Religious Leaders, Non-Governmental Organizations, academia, Early Childhood Networks and civil society as a whole in the response to humanitarian crises, to mitigate the impact on families and young children living in situations of conflict, military occupation, and displacement. ”

STRATEGY 2025-2030

Our Goal: Ensure that early childhood development (ECD) is recognized and operationalized as a pillar of sustainable development in global governance, systems, and investment frameworks.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

Our work is grounded in four key areas of evidence-based practice:

1. Research

- Embed ECD and trauma-informed parenting programs into global sustainable development knowledge systems (e.g., UN data platforms, IPCC-style ECD reports)
- Advance cross-sectoral and intergenerational research to evaluate outcomes and sustainability impacts

2. Practice

- Institutionalize ECD and trauma-informed parenting programs as core services delivered across education, health, environment, peacebuilding, and child protection systems in conflict-affected contexts
- Align ECD services with the principles of peacebuilding, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability

3. Advocacy

- Secure the inclusion of ECD and trauma-informed parenting programs as a stated goal in the post-2030 global development agenda
- Mobilize champions for ECD and trauma-informed parenting programs within multilateral institutions and global civil society

4. Policy

- Influence global financing mechanisms (e.g., Sustainable Development Goals successor funds, World Bank instruments, climate finance) to include dedicated investments linking ECD and trauma-informed parenting programs to sustainable peace
- Embed ECD governance structures and priorities within national and regional coordination frameworks

For more information please contact secretariat@ecdpeace.org

¹ Guidance Note of the Secretary General (2023). Child Rights Mainstreaming.

² First-of-its kind study: Violence leaves its mark on the human genome across generations.

³ Overview of the ECPC's Research and Practice (2021). Love and Peace Across Generations (2021). Pathways to a more peaceful and sustainable world (2021).

⁴ The Sustainable Development Goals addressed early childhood development specifically, for the first time, through target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

⁵ Urgent Appeal to Stop War Against Children Now.

ecdpeace.org

