



NURTURING CARE
FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Advancing Nurturing Care in Humanitarian Settings

Overview of workshops in Arab countries



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Background

An estimated 29 million babies were born into conflict-affected areas in 2018 (UNICEF, 2019). Young children in these situations, particularly those aged 0-5, face compounded risks to their development stemming from multiple adverse experiences which may include exposure to war and conflict, forced displacement, migration, and resettlement in new settings, such as a refugee camp, or integration within host communities. The ‘double emergency’ induced by the COVID-19 pandemic has only compounded these challenges.

To mitigate these risks, an integrated set of crisis-sensitive services across health, including MPHSS, nutrition, education, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), social/protection-related sectors are needed. In alignment with the **Nurturing Care Framework** (NCF) (**Arabic**), caregivers, when supported to care for themselves and equipped with the knowledge and resources, are best placed to provide their children nurturing care.

National and subnational leadership is needed to incorporate and optimize early childhood development in humanitarian settings. Actors across governments and the humanitarian architecture must not only mobilize together behind a comprehensive approach for preparedness and recovery for acute and protracted crises but also drive forward and sustain the necessary robust long-term investments for continued prioritization.

An advocacy brief published late 2020 entitled **Nurturing care for children living in humanitarian settings** (available in **Arabic** and **Spanish**) provided guidance to decision makers on adapting existing efforts given the specific needs and challenges of context-specific crises. Following the release of the brief, the **Arab Network for Early Childhood** (ANECD), **International Rescue Committee** (IRC), **Save the Children**, **UNICEF** and **World Health Organization** (WHO) came together to disseminate the brief and foster country-level action. A global working group was formed in early 2021 comprising of representatives from the same five organizations at global and regional levels. Together, they supported five national task teams to organize multisectoral and multistakeholder workshops between October and December 2021.

This report describes the process for organizing the workshops, reflects on cross-cutting issues and ideas that emerged across the workshops and outlines a set of recommendations for continuing to advance nurturing care in the five contexts as well as in other contexts affected by crisis.

For a summary of the workshop proceedings and identified priority actions in each of the five contexts, please consult the nurturing care website at: <https://nurturing-care.org/events/nurturing-care-for-children-living-in-humanitarian-settings/>.

Preparing for the workshops

Formed in March of 2021, the “nurturing care for children living in humanitarian settings” global working group was comprised of representatives from the WHO, UNICEF, IRC, SC and ANECD at global and regional levels. Because these organizations were all present in the Middle East region, the initial focus of this group was to support countries in this region. The plan was to organize one regional or multi-country workshop virtually to collectively generate an actionable regional roadmap that prioritizes policy and financing for the holistic development of crisis-affected young children, with a commitment from key regional stakeholders to implement. While several countries (i.e. Lebanon, Yemen, Turkey) were not part of the process due to myriad factors of circumstance following consultations with country staff, those that expressed interest underscored the strong demand for individualized country support.

As a result, the modality of discussions shifted from one regional event to national workshops with countries that had signalled an interest in holding these workshops in 2021. Although the shift from a regional to national workshops lost the consolidated cross-context perspective of ECD priorities across humanitarian settings in the Middle East, it opened the opportunity for more detailed and context-specific discussions to take place at the country level. Figure 1 provides an overview of the process.

FIGURE 1. THE PROCESS.



National task teams—consisting of country representation from the partnering organizations—were set up in each context to mobilize support for holding these workshops with local government and NGO representations and to organize the actual event. National task teams were the key drivers in framing these workshops around the NCF vision with support and guidance from the global working group. In addition, the global working group developed various templates that could be tailored to different contexts (e.g., pre-recorded presentations, agendas, session plans for group work) and held regular meetings with the national task teams to support workshop preparations.

The result was five workshops held between October and December 2021. The workshops included participants from different sectors, such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, academia, and other stakeholder groups, to deepen and catalyze multisectoral collaborations for early childhood development. These workshops varied in duration (1 to 3 days), language (Arabic only, Arabic with English translation), and modality (virtual, in-person, or mixed).

All workshops sought to explore how the key actors were implementing the *Nurturing Care Framework*, especially for children and their families who have been affected by a crisis. During the workshops, participants had an opportunity to share work underway and their experiences, to reflect on their points of strengths, opportunities, and challenges, to learn about new local and international approaches and initiatives, and to agree on a way forward together. Each workshop concluded with the identification of priority actions to be taken in 2022 and beyond.

Following each workshop, each country team submitted a report of the workshop and a copy of the workshop materials (e.g., presentations, notes from group work). These materials served as the basis for the cross-cutting themes, lessons learned, and ideas for the way forward that are included in this report.

Cross-cutting themes

The themes and actions that emerged from the workshops across all contexts are as follows:

- Conduct governance of ECD cross-sectionally in a comprehensive manner to address challenges and making evidence-driven decisions on policy and legislation related to ECD. Governance leadership should be placed outside of the Ministries of Education, Health, and Social Affairs/Development to allow for effective cross-sectoral coordination within governmental structures and non-governmental actors.
- Ensure the availability of data for effective policymaking in ECD as well as harmonized efforts to collect, maintain, and analyze ECD data was consistently seen as a priority. The responsibility to lead on such efforts sits with Statistics Departments/Bureaus or Ministries of Planning in coordination with the leading ECD governance body.
- Shift conversations around “humanitarian needs” in ECD towards guaranteed inclusion in national system service delivery, as opposed to refugee or IDP-specific pathways, recognizing the reality of protracted displacement. Although the treatment of refugees and internally-displaced people as an explicit sub-group of the population that has specified needs varies from one context to the other, further country-specific deep-dives led by international humanitarian agencies and government partners would provide the space for such conversations and narrative shifts to take place.
- Expand ECD conversations to include the full set of related government stakeholders and involvement. Although there was ample participation of “accountable” government entities in the workshop discussions, involvement of higher-level governance or ministries of finance stakeholders unfolds new opportunities on future actions. An area where this was identified as particularly helpful is in the discussions around ECD financing, where the Ministries of Finance can provide the necessary insights on innovative financing approaches and identify ways to match financing with ECD ambitions.

Lessons Learned

The global working group identified the following lessons as enabling factors that led to the successful facilitation and implementation of the workshops:

Engagement of partners regionally and nationally

- The regional and national working group structure proved indispensable in the successful implementation of the workshops. Strengths at the regional level translated to stronger coordination and alignment at the national level, paving the way for effective operational planning of the workshops and resolution of bottlenecks.
- Engaging government partners from the beginning in the planning process allowed for strong ownership and buy-in across the multiple contexts and sectors.
- Inviting local partners to the event (e.g., academia and local NGOs) widened the discussion to ensure that planning is aligned with both i) leading evidence in the space as well as ii) the expectations and lived experiences of those living in the humanitarian settings.

Embedding current political planning as the thematic focus of the workshops

- Strong ownership and agency by government was reinforced by ensuring that the discussions were focused on current government plans and priorities. This enabled more visibility/transparency and realistic, actionable planning.

The importance of building and maintaining national ECD “institutions”

- The nature of the discussions was influenced by the current presence and strength of organizations or entities mandated to lead on ECD policy-making in each country. In some countries, the discussion was focused on setting a strategic direction for ECD whereas others focused on execution of a set vision.

Variable understanding of nurturing care

- Discussions regarding nurturing care permeated all workshops. However, local understanding of the intersection of these components and how to apply this lens in policies and programmes varies considerably. Consistently impressing a common understanding on the interlocked nature of child development across sectors would ensure that key ministries and stakeholders can better address the needs of their population.

Way forward

The workshops resulted in a set of priority actions in each context. These priority actions are primarily related to:

- increasing advocacy/sensitization at the highest levels (especially finance)
- collecting and using data to inform advocacy efforts, policies and programmes
- strengthening multisectoral collaboration and governance mechanisms
- ensuring available funds get to those who need it most (and increase funding).

The global working group will continue to meet with the national task teams to follow-up on the agreed upon priority actions. They will also work with the national task teams to identify strategies for ensuring national policies, plans and programmes are inclusive of refugee, migrant and displaced populations.

Finally, the global working group will identify or create opportunities for learning and exchange across the countries involved as well as others in the region and beyond. Now that there is momentum in each of the countries, a regional or multi-country event may be considered.