
PALESTINE

WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS¹

Date: 20 October 2021

Time: 9h00 - 15h30 Jerusalem time (virtual and in-person)

Hosted by the Ministry of Social Development in collaboration with UNICEF, WHO, and the Palestinian Network for Early Childhood Development.

Financial supported provided by UNICEF.

Participants

- The workshop in Palestine was conducted under the patronage of the Ministry of Social Development and with technical and financial support from UNICEF, WHO, and the Palestinian network for ECD.
- The workshop took place in a hybrid format, where actors in the ECD space in the West Bank participated physically in the event which took place in An-Najah University - while attendees based in Gaza and elsewhere in the region participated virtually. The 53 attendees represented the following stakeholder groups:

Government: Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health

Academia: An-Najah University, Al-Quds University

National Organizations and Networks: Palestinian ECD Network, Juzoor Organization, Al-TufulaCenter, Early Childhood Resource Centre

Regional Network: Arab Network for Early Childhood

International Organizations: International Rescue Committee, UNICEF, UNRWA, World Health Organization, World Vision International

Presentations

The 1-day workshop saw presentations from government representatives on the strategic aims, objectives, and challenges within their respective organizations and ECD more broadly.

The opening session included pre-recorded **presentations** in Arabic prepared by WHO and UNICEF on the *Nurturing Care Framework* as well as a presentation by ANECD on ECD in crisis from a regional perspective.

There were also presentations by key organizations active in ECD in Palestine. Some of the highlights of the presentations made were as follows:

Ministry of Social Development

Key challenges noted: effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on execution of programs and services, poor coordination across sectors/organizations working in ECD and lack of clear roles and responsibilities, limited human and financial resources, caregiver capacity gaps especially in screening for developmental delays, and the lack of a consolidated database for ECD.

¹ For information on other workshops in the series visit: <https://nurturing-care.org/events/nurturing-care-for-children-living-in-humanitarian-settings/>.

Ministry of Health

Key challenges noted: staff shortages, lack of government referral centres/systems, difficulties in accessing areas for service provision (due to checkpoints), poor resources/lack of funding/financing, and a lack of clear financing/funding plan by donors that aligns with the needs of the ECD Strategy (2017-2022).

Ministry of Education and Higher Education

Key challenges noted: unlicensed kindergartens with limited-to-no quality or safety standards, low enrolment rates in kindergartens (~70%), staffing shortages in central government (in ECE-related departments), no “stable” budgets to support and develop the ECE/kindergarten sector, poor working conditions in private kindergartens (low salaries, limited annual leaves, etc.) that are in breach of local labour laws, kindergarten caregivers/teachers are largely unqualified (only a third 32% have a qualification that matches ECE), community-based kindergartens in underdeveloped areas lack the necessary financial and material support (especially because they are low-fee kindergartens), screening and diagnosis of children with disabilities and their inclusion in kindergartens is not at a suitable level.

UNRWA (focusing on health sector)

Role in ECD service provision in Palestine: >11K newborns are registered in UNRWA primary health care in the West Bank every year, >52K children under 5 currently registered in UNRWA primary healthcare in the West Bank, UNRWA provides schooling across G1-9 in the West Bank.

Key challenges facing UNRWA noted: financial/funding challenges, difficulties in costing essential ECD services and identifying responsible parties for allocation, suspension of new recruitment and unqualified/inadequately trained personnel, difficulty in accessing some communities and areas.

Context

- ECD has long been a priority area nationally for Palestine according to the report generated, but the quality of services provided has suffered as a result of the sectoral fragmentation, misalignment, and a lack of public fund allocations as much of funding is provided by partners.
- There are a number of cross-sectoral bodies that aim to develop, promote, and implement ECD policies in Palestine; including the National Council for Early Childhood Development (NCECD) and the Palestinian Early Childhood Development Network.
- The workshop came at a critical time for Palestine, seeing as the existing national ECD strategy launched in 2017 was due to end in 2022. The workshop was seen as a unique opportunity by organizers and attendees to reflect on what has been achieved over the past 4-5 years to guide the way forward for ECD - with a focus on integrating programming that promotes nurturing care.
- Many of the discussions held throughout the workshop activities, therefore, were centred around extending, activating, or strengthening the goals and activities set forth for ECD through the national strategy.
- The workshop acted as means to mobilize key stakeholders in updating and expanded the existing ECD strategy. As a follow up to the workshop, partners have been engaged in revising the existing national ECD strategy, extending it for 2023 and integrating attention to nurturing care for children and families living in humanitarian setting. In addition, the workshop contributed to expanding the membership of the ECD National Committee by including the Palestinian ECD network.

Workshop Outputs and Priorities

The breakout sessions grouped participants under three strategic actions listed in the NCF: i) Creating political will and investment for ECD in Palestine, ii) Strengthening programs to ensure all children receive nurturing care, and iii) Nurturing care for ECD data management. Below is a summary of the priority actions that emerged from the group work.

Proposed priority actions

Creating political will and investment for ECD in Palestine

Priority 1: Update the national ECD strategy in partnership with all sectors so that programs are adopted as multi-sectoral and integrated. Additionally, private sector and CSOs should be provided with funds and support for implementation of ECD programs; their added value is crucial.

Priority 2: Activate the Higher Council for Childhood (HCC) in partnership with all sectors, develop a clear action plan for the HCC, and establish regular meetings with stakeholders.

Strengthening programs to ensure all children receive nurturing care

Priority 1: Institutionalize and implement a standardized measurement tool adapted to the Palestinian context for early detection of delayed growth and development among children at an early age (including referral criteria).

Priority 2: Activate an effective referral system between the relevant sectors (education, health, protection, etc.).

Priority 3: Prepare “model” referral centres distributed across governorates to facilitate the screening cases that require referral.

Enhancing data base and policy-oriented research

Priority: Invest in, and conduct research in ECD with a view to improve planning and quality of interventions delivered across sectors.

Additional recommendations proposed under this theme include:

- Conduct an assessment of existing data on ECD.
- Update data collection tools, and critically assess existing data collection approaches (i.e. from efficiency, ethical perspectives among others).
- Strengthen the use of data and research in policy-making.
- Identify ECD research priorities at a national level (topics and funding).
- Develop consolidated data collection tools and metrics for ECD.

Governance: in addition to the priority actions listed above, the workshop prompted a decision to review and revise the ToR set for the ECD committee to more clearly define the roles and responsibilities going forward and further expand its partnership with relevant actors.

Priority Actions

GOAL 1: TO CREATE A POLITICAL WILL AND INCREASE INVESTMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD IN PALESTINE

Brief description of relevant activities	Responsible entity	Target date for completion	Source of funding and technical support needed	Partners
1.1 Updating the national strategy in partnership with all sectors so that EC programs are adopted as multisectoral and integrated	National ECD Committee	2022	WHO UNICEF World Bank Save the Children UNRWA	Palestinian Network for ECD (PNECD) National ECD Committee
1.2 Activating the Higher Council for Childhood and developing a clear action plan.	Prime Ministry with the Ministries of Health, Education, & Social Development	2022 - 2025	Local support UNICEF Ministry of Social Development WHO Academia	PNECD National ECD Committee

GOAL 2: TO SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN IMPLEMENTATION OF NURTURING CARE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

Brief description of relevant activities	Responsible entity	Target date for completion	Source of funding and technical support needed	Partners
2.1 Application of a standardized measurement tool adapted to the Palestinian context for early detection of delayed growth and development among children at an early age including criteria for referrals	Ministries of Health, Education, & Social Development Local & International NGOs UNRWA	First quarter of 2022	Relevant Ministries WHO UNICEF World Bank	Palestinian Network for ECD (PNECD) ECD National Committee
2.2 Activating an effective referral system between relevant sectors	Relevant ministries UNRWA Local & international NGOs	Second half of 2022	UN Agencies World Bank Local support Relevant ministries	PNECD ECD National Committee
2.3 Equipping pilot centres eligible for referrals in different governorates.	Relevant ministries UNRWA Local & international NGOs	Second half of 2022	UN Agencies World Bank Local sources Relevant ministries People with expertise	PNECD ECD National Committee

GOAL 3: TO ENHANCE DATA BASE AND POLICY-ORIENTED RESEARCH

Brief description of relevant activities	Responsible entity	Target date for completion	Source of funding and technical support needed	Partners
3.1 Conducting advanced scientific research in the field of ECD leading to better planning and improving the quality of interventions.	Ministries of Health, Education, & Social Development Local & international NGOs UNRWA	Second half of 2022	Relevant Ministries WHO UNICEF World Bank	PNECD ECD National Committee