
SYRIA

WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS¹

Date: 15 to 16 December 2021

Time: 8h00 - 14h30 Damascus time (virtual and in-person)

Hosted by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with UNICEF, WHO and the Aga Khan Development Network.

Financial support provided by WHO.

Participants

- This two-day workshop was organized under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, and with support from the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), and the Arab Network for Early Childhood (ANECD).
- The workshop included 37 representatives from government and non-governmental organizations:

Government: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Local Administration and Environment, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Communications and Technology, Ministry of Water Resources, Central Bureau of Statistics, Syrian Commission for Family and Population Affairs (SCFPA)

Non-Governmental Organizations: World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, World Food Programme, SOS Children's Villages, Red Crescent Organization, Aga Khan Development Network, Arab Network for Early Childhood

Presentations

- Representatives from the SCFPA showcased the status of ECD in Syria, and their experience in ECD policy, strategy, and coordination.
- The opening included **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 three consecutive panel discussions held focused on health, nutrition, and education respectively in which panelists from the Government of Syria presented on key achievements, challenges, and priorities for each sector as it relates to ECD.
- The format of the workshop was in the form of a roundtable discussion with the aim of coordinating between the different governmental/non-governmental sectoral actors towards developing/updating sectoral plans and operationalization mechanisms to improve ECD service provision.

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

-
- Specifically, the following policy issues were discussed: improving governance systems, generating commitment on the side of policy makers in the ECD space, allocating necessary funding, data measurement and progress measurement, allocating sufficient human resources, and assessment of rapid responses.
 - Some of the challenges identified and discussed throughout the workshop is as follows:
 - » Lack of an integrated preparedness and contingency plan.
 - » Lack of well-equipped places to accommodate displaced children.
 - » Gap in qualified human resources in some sectors.
 - » Lack of harmonized financial compensation between government and non-governmental bodies which affects the equity between services providers.
 - » Neglecting the elements of “development and change” in emergency response.
 - » Limitation in complying to child protection standards during the response.
 - » Unavailability of standardized services in each sector.
 - » Unavailability of services location signs in the accommodation centres; and challenges in providing clear communication messages.
 - » Camps in out-of-control areas have unauthorized NGOs providing services while governmental services couldn't have access provided.
 - » Gaps in knowledge and misunderstanding of the concept of ECD.
 - » Nurturing care isn't in the same level of importance in all ministries, and it has challenge in securing sustainable fund for it.
 - » Lack of effective community engagement.
 - » Lack of a shared database between sectors.
 - » Challenges in maintaining strong coordination and effective response between sectors.
 - » Lack of effective and continuing monitoring and quality assessment of the provided services.
 - The workshop was seen by organizers and participants as an opportunity to underline the importance of finalizing the draft ECD strategy for Syria.

Workshop Outputs and Priorities

Due to the format of the workshop and nature of the discussions that took place, priorities were not generated in line with the components of nurturing care nor the strategic actions of the NCF. Instead, the priorities in Syria - Damascus looked at priorities per functional area as follows:

Proposed priority actions

Governance and Coordination

- Form a national ECD coordination and planning committee, that includes representatives from different sectors and relevant organizations to develop and coordinate on cross-sectoral activities related to ECD (including planning for -and coordination on-mechanisms for joint implementation). Formation of sub-committees at the governorate level for the execution of this mandate at the local/community level.
- Expand participation in the process to include all stakeholders in the community, including relevant ministries, NGOs, trade unions, and experts (e.g., Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Higher Education, Academia).

Financing

- Determine available and potential funding sources and find the means to secure additional resources.

Services

- Work to enhance and expand the experience of integrated care for the health and development of the child in health centres with its societal dimensions, in coordination with the relevant international organizations.
- Integrate mental health and psychosocial support into nurturing care activities, including support for primary caregivers.
- Adopt a life-course approach to consider the principles of ECD and foster care in all programs that target different age groups.

Capacity-Building

- Develop a plan for capacity-building among the cadres and leaders of relevant sectors at all levels.

Data Management

- Develop an information system and database to maintain, monitor, and evaluate ECD data and progress on ECD programs.
- Make data, lessons learned, and applied research available online and on social media platforms.

Advocacy and Communications

- Establish a communication mechanism between the different ECD actors to exchange information, ideas, reports, and data on activities (starting by this workshop).
- Develop and execute an advocacy strategy and action plan to influence actors in ministries and other organizations on the significance of embedding ECD.
- Coordinate with media to produce informational and educational materials and to spread knowledge and awareness about nurturing care for early childhood.

Community Participation

- ECD programs and services to embed community participation in design and delivery, including identification of needs and empowerment for primary caregivers (parents) and community workers (community-based projects).

Priority Actions

In Damascus, the workshop came out with recommendations and follow-up mechanisms, some of which are the following:

At the strategic level

- Forming a national committee including representatives from different sectors and relevant organizations to develop, follow-up, and coordinate an action plan including mechanisms for its implementation.
- Determining the available and potential funding sources and find means to secure additional resources.
- Expanding participation in the process to include all stakeholders in the community, including relevant ministries, NGOs, trade unions, and experts.
- Ensuring that health centres take into account the nurturing care components.
- Integrating mental health and psychosocial support into nurturing care activities, including support for primary caregivers.

At the capacity building level

- Developing a plan for advocacy and capacity building among the various cadres and leaders of relevant sectors at all levels.

At the data base and communication level

- Establishing a communication mechanism between the participants to exchange information, ideas, reports, and data on activities starting by this workshop.
- Coordinating with the media to produce informational and educational materials and to spread knowledge and awareness about nurturing care for early childhood.
- Developing an information system to monitor and evaluate the progress.
- Making data, lessons learned, and applied research available on electronic platforms.