



Humanitarian Response to Education in Emergencies

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Sesame Workshop and its partners are building the largest early childhood intervention in the history of humanitarian response to address the educational needs of children affected by the Syrian and Rohingya crises.



The LEGO Foundation

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Introduction

This document provides the reader with information about Sesame Workshop’s humanitarian response to address the early childhood development needs of children affected by displacement. It outlines the guiding framework that supports the design of Sesame Workshop’s humanitarian programs. The document also analyzes how these programs’ frameworks align with international guidelines and standards.

Needs of young children and families affected by displacement

Displacement is a growing problem worldwide. Currently, 70 million people are displaced and 30 million of them are children¹. Emergency response, once considered to be short-term, immediate assistance for the onset of crises, has become protracted with generations of children spending significant portions of their lives displaced from their homes. Education remains a challenging resource to provide in these contexts. Additionally, it is often considered to be of lower importance next to meeting basic necessities, such as food and water. However, education—particularly early childhood education—is an under-recognized but vital provision for those facing emergencies. It has the potential to alleviate conflict by breaking the cycle of poverty²; provide psychological support through the routine and daily structure offered by school schedules³; and improve academic⁴, economic⁵, and health⁶ outcomes for children. The United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights identifies education as a human right,⁷ the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees promotes refugee access to education,⁸ and Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for quality education for all.⁹ Despite global calls for action and its noted benefits, education in emergencies receives less than 3% of humanitarian aid support,¹⁰ resulting in generations of children left with little to no access to the education that would support an improved future.

Early childhood development

The early years of a child’s life are critical. During this time, young children require special care and abundant stimulation. Adverse childhood experiences, such as forced displacement, abuse, violence, can lead to long-lasting trauma¹¹. A strong foundation in early development help can alleviate the impact of

¹ United Nations. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/refugees/>

² Versmesse, I., Derluyn, I. Masschelein, J. and De Haene, L. (2017) After conflict comes education? Reflections on the representations of emergencies in ‘Education in Emergencies’. *Comparative Education*, 53(4), 538-557

³ Joyner, A. (1996) Supporting education in emergencies: A case study from southern Sudan. *Development in Practice*, 6(1), 70-76

⁴ Skran, C. (2008) Returnees in Sierra Leone. *Forced Migration Review*, 10, 29.

⁵ Burde, D., Kapit, A., Wahl, R., Guven, O. and Igland Skarpeteig, M. (2017) Education in Emergencies: A Review of Theory and Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(3), 619-658.

⁶ Joyner, A. (1996) Supporting education in emergencies: A case study from southern Sudan. *Development in Practice*, 6(1), 70-76

⁷ United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

⁸ United Nations. (2018) *Global compact on refugees*.

⁹ United Nations Development Programme. (2015). *Sustainable Development Goals*.

¹⁰ United Nations Children's Fund. (n.d.). *Education in Emergencies*.

¹¹ Park, M. and Katsiaficas, C. (2019) Mitigating the Effects of Trauma among Young Children of Immigrants and Refugees: The Role of Early Childhood Programs. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

these traumatic experiences and improve children's overall well-being¹². Sesame Workshop recognizes this; together with our partners, we aim to bring greater attention to the role of early childhood development in emergency settings and engage institutions in increasing the presence of innovative and play-based learning programming for humanitarian contexts.

Our ability to contribute uniquely to early childhood development

Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization known for worldwide educational programming featuring loveable, furry Muppets, uses its unique models to contribute to early childhood development responses in humanitarian settings. For over fifty years, our programming has served vulnerable children and communities in more than 150 countries. The use of multimedia allows Sesame to effectively address and model positive behaviors for children to observe and mirror. Television is an available resource that facilitates the scalability of our programming, allowing these educational media messages to reach more children (both in refugee camps and in host communities) than possible through direct services alone. In Jordan and Lebanon, 99% of homes surveyed have at least one media device; televisions are found in 75% of those homes¹³. TVs are the most owned media device in Syria and has the highest penetration of the mass media devices surveyed¹⁴. When television is not a viable option, Sesame creates innovative ways to distribute content to hard-to-reach populations. This includes radio programming, mobile phone resources, community viewing sessions, print assets, and storybooks.

Play-based learning

Research has shown that young children learn best through play. Play creates opportunities for cognitive, physical and social emotional development and fosters creativity.

Sesame Workshop's humanitarian educational frameworks embrace play-based learning as an overarching approach to early childhood development. This assures content is joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, socially interactive, and iterative¹⁵. Supported by



evidence-based curricular methods, our Muppets speak to children about difficult topics in child-friendly

¹² United Nations Children's Fund. (n.d.) Why Early Childhood Development? Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_40748.html

¹³ Sesame Seeds Jordan/Lebanon Media & Brand study. 690 Parents with a child 0-8. March 2018. Q5 Which of the following devices do you have in your household? Please select all that apply.

¹⁴ Iraq & Syria Kids Media Trends. Q3 Which of the following devices do you own and/or use to connect to the internet?

¹⁵ Zosh, et al., 2017

ways. Each framework is tailored to meet the needs of global communities and cultural relevancy is considered, with local early childhood development experts consulted throughout the development process.

Adults play an important role in guiding and creating opportunities for play. Sesame's messaging also targets the caregivers that are likely watching episodes alongside their children. The objectives of these messages include the expansion of early childhood development knowledge, self-care techniques and guidance on safe play-based interactions with children. Additionally, direct service providers, such as Play Leaders and teachers, are trained in the promotion of playful and engaging learning opportunities.

Strategic Partnerships

Sesame Workshop values partnerships and strategic alliances that accelerate positive social impact. We engage with partners to implement direct services to maximize the number of children receiving early education, nurturing care and playful learning opportunities. *Ahlan Simsim* and Play to Learn are prime examples of the fruitfulness of such partnerships. With support from MacArthur Foundation and the LEGO Foundation, Sesame Workshop, the International Rescue Committee, and BRAC are working together in Bangladesh and the Syrian response region to create the largest early childhood intervention in the history of humanitarian response.

Alignment with key guidelines and actors

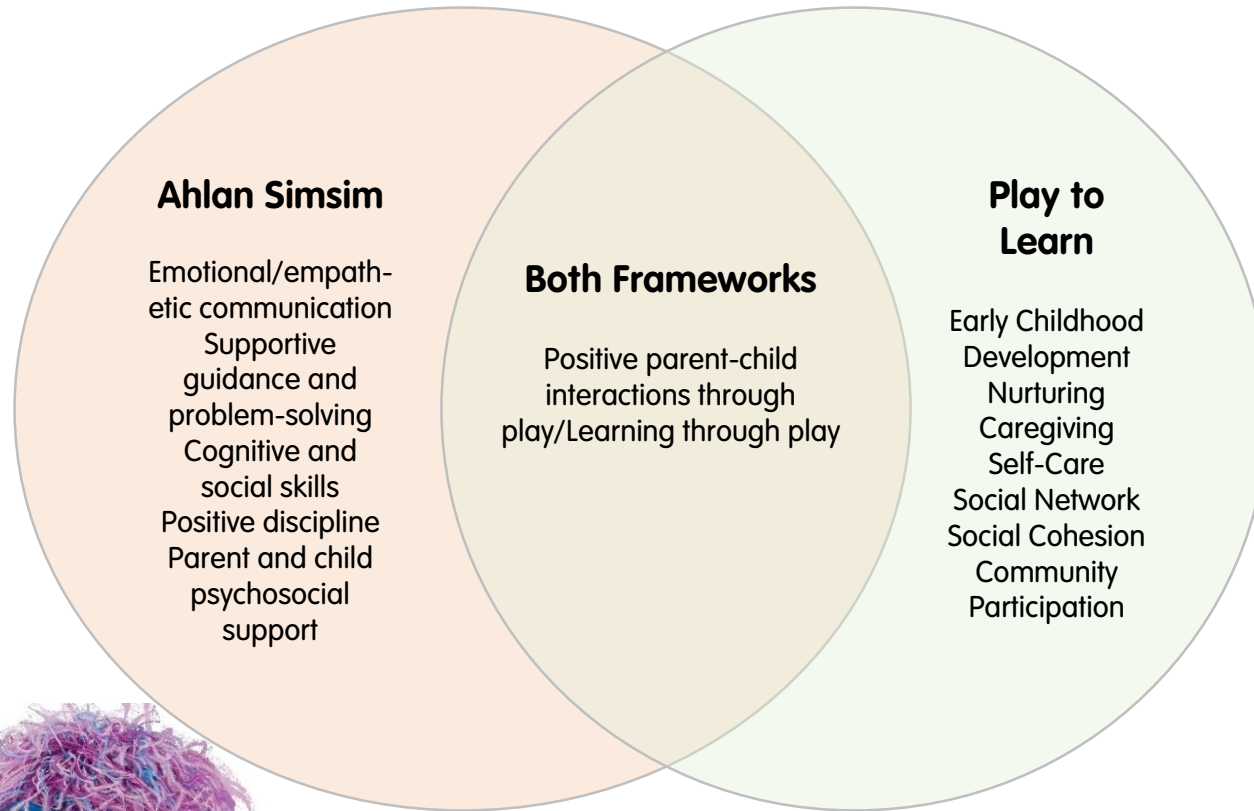


Humanitarian and education actors have created international standards to support programming decisions for education in emergencies. Sesame Workshop predominately uses the Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development Framework and the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education to shape our approach to early childhood development in humanitarian contexts. Our programs aim to create models that are replicable for wider humanitarian contexts. We are testing and developing supporting content to suit multiple settings while allowing flexibility to incorporate messaging that addresses the unique needs of each setting.

Child-Directed Objectives from Sesame Workshop's Humanitarian Programs Consolidated Educational Frameworks



Caregiver-Directed Objectives from Sesame Workshop's Humanitarian Programs Consolidated Educational Frameworks



Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development Framework

Ahlan Simsim, in the Middle East, and Play to Learn, in Bangladesh, Jordan, and Lebanon, provide support for responsive caregiving, opportunities for early learning, and techniques to improve physical and mental health, all of which align with the Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development Framework. In addition to these categories, Play to Learn includes components that address balanced nutrition, safety, and child protection strategies for a whole-child approach.

For *Ahlan Simsim*, social- emotional learning was identified as a particularly critical need for refugees and children facing conflict. Therefore, *Ahlan Simsim* maintains a heavy focus on social- emotional learning in its mass media component. *Ahlan Simsim* direct services for children, such as preschool healing classrooms and play and learning spaces, as well as programs targeting caregivers and families of young children such as home visiting programs, group-based parenting programs and other parenting support initiatives, offer opportunities for more comprehensive, whole-child curricula, as well as individual, tailored learning. Like the *Ahlan Simsim* series, the learning outcomes for direct services have a strong emphasis on social emotional learning, but also include elements of a whole child curriculum, including language, literacy and numeracy.



Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education

Ahlan Simsim and Play to Learn utilize objectives outlined in the INEE Strategic Framework. The programs provide high-quality curricula for children facing emergencies, while caregiver facing content support the protection and well-being of children. Sesame's strong research team conducts assessments of the learning outcomes to gauge the effectiveness of the print and video media on achieving the educational objectives described in the Consolidated Frameworks of each program. Strengthened by the expertise in early childhood development and the consultation of local experts, the Sesame humanitarian program models maintain focus on instruction and the learning process. They support the expansion of educational services with the goal of bringing greater attention to the need and importance of education in emergencies.



Through Play to Learn, an emphasis was placed on creating content relevant for the Rohingya population. Sesame has extensive history creating content that showcases children and caregivers in their local context to deliver educational topics in environments that are relatable. The localized media blocks being developed for Play to Learn will be paired with globally applicable content to extend learning opportunities. This approach will assure that the needs within the Rohingya camps are met with relevant and culturally-sensitive resources while creating globally applicable content for use within future humanitarian interventions. The areas of educational focus include Mathematics, Environmental Education, Social-Emotional Learning, Child Protection and Health & Safety.

Humanitarian Program Alignment to Internationally Recognized Educational Standards

	Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development Framework	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards for Education Domain 3: Teaching and Learning Standard I: Curricula	Bangladesh Guideline for Informal Education Program Domain 4.2: Learning Levels	Early Learning and Development Standards in All Essential Domains of School Readiness (Birth – Age 5)
 Ahlan Simsim	60%	100%	N/A	53%
 Play to Learn	100%	100%	100%	92%

Sesame Workshop's overarching educational vision and approach


Despite the fact that humanitarian contexts vary vastly in their needs and resources, there are a few overarching threads that guide our humanitarian approach.

First, all children need nurturing care. *Ahlan Simsim* and Play to Learn both focus on engaging children through holistic and nurturing care. These interventions are based on play and how play can support the development of children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills. We intertwine this with content that address the mental health needs of caregivers—children's primary support group.

Second, many children who grow up in humanitarian settings are particularly susceptible to adverse childhood experiences, both in their home countries and in refugee camps^{16,17}. These traumatic experiences may include physical and emotional neglect; caregiver mental illness; household or community violence; and displacement. Our humanitarian content supports the development of crucial

¹⁶ Kane JC, Ventevogel P, Spiegel P, Bass JK, van Ommeren M, Tol WA. (2014) Mental, neurological, and substance use problems among refugees in primary health care: analysis of the Health Information System in 90 refugee camps. *BMC Med*, 12, 228.

¹⁷ Seddio, K. (2017) Trauma, Psychopathology, and the Refugee Crisis: A Call to Action. *Am J Public Health*, 107(7), 1044-1045.



social-emotional skills that children need to respond to these adverse experiences. We create content intended for both displaced audiences and host communities, as we know that children in low-resource settings--both inside and outside of refugee camps--face similar challenges.

The differences between the two humanitarian programs support their adaptation to the local needs. For most Syrian refugees, education was readily accessible in their home countries prior to the crisis, while Rohingya have been historically marginalized and have had fewer opportunities for formal education. Low- and no-text print resources are directed to populations with low literacy rates to fill the educational gap. A significant challenge faced by the Rohingya Play to Learn program involves language. The Rohingya language does not have a written form and is not widely spoken outside of the Rohingya population. This differs from the experiences with the *Ahlan Simsim* effort in which the displaced and host communities share a common language. Content for Play to Learn is being translated into Bangla and Rohingya with the consultation of local language experts.

Conclusion

We are answering the call to promote and prioritize early childhood development in humanitarian settings by bringing together actors across humanitarian, development, philanthropic, media, and academic spheres. Our humanitarian programs are testing and developing early childhood educational content for use in current and future emergencies. We strive to channel the power of ‘learning through play’ to reach the world’s most vulnerable children.

Appendix I

Mapping of Humanitarian Program Frameworks to Internationally Recognized Educational Standards



Humanitarian
Mapping.xlsx

Appendix 2

Linking Play to Learn Consolidated Educational Framework to Multimedia and Print Content Creation

Play to Learn Educational Framework Review and Refinement

- The Play to Learn Consolidated Educational Framework steers the design behind the educational materials.
- The Play to Learn Consolidated Educational Framework was reviewed and refined for better alignment to the Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development Framework.
- The selected educational outcomes for Children (**Emotional, Social, Creative, Cognitive, and Physical Development**) and for Caregivers (**Emotional and Social Well-being and Early Childhood Development Knowledge**) all unite to provide programming and materials that meet the standards laid out by the Nurturing Care framework.
- In alignment with the INEE Minimum Standard's Teaching and Learning Domain Standard 1, the Play to Learn Consolidated Educational Framework guides Play to Learn content creation to be "culturally, socially and linguistically relevant".

Global Block Curriculum Development

- From this guiding framework, the Play to Learn global video blocks place a strong focus on **Math, Environment, Social-Emotional Learning** and **Health and Safety** messages to be presented to a global audience.
- These topics carry relevance to a global audience and can reach large audiences through engaging multimedia formats.
- The curriculum is tiered in the aim of reaching children between the ages 2-6, as targeted by the Play to Learn Consolidated Educational Framework.

Storybook Co-creation

- The co-creation process creates opportunities for knowledge exchange between Sesame Workshop and partners to support the creation of contextualized and relevant content.
- The focuses of the four storybooks reinforce the Play to Learn Consolidated Educational Framework, addressing **Pro-Social Behaviors, Mathematics, Physical Health, Literacy** and **Critical Thinking**.

Live Action Film Development

- Localized content help children better understand how to practice **health and safety behaviors** in environments that reflect their own spaces.
- The Live Action Films hit on educational outcomes from the Play to Learn Consolidated Educational Framework (**Social, Physical, and Cognitive**) with videos focused on **health and safety, math** and **pro-social behaviors**.

Rohingya Muppet Creation

- The creation of Rohingya muppets supports Rohingya children's **Emotional** development for positive outlooks on his/her attributes and **Identity** by depicting characters that share commonalities in cultural adherences and physical characteristics.
- They create opportunities for **Social** development with a better **understanding of self** which lends itself to deepened **understanding and respect for others**.