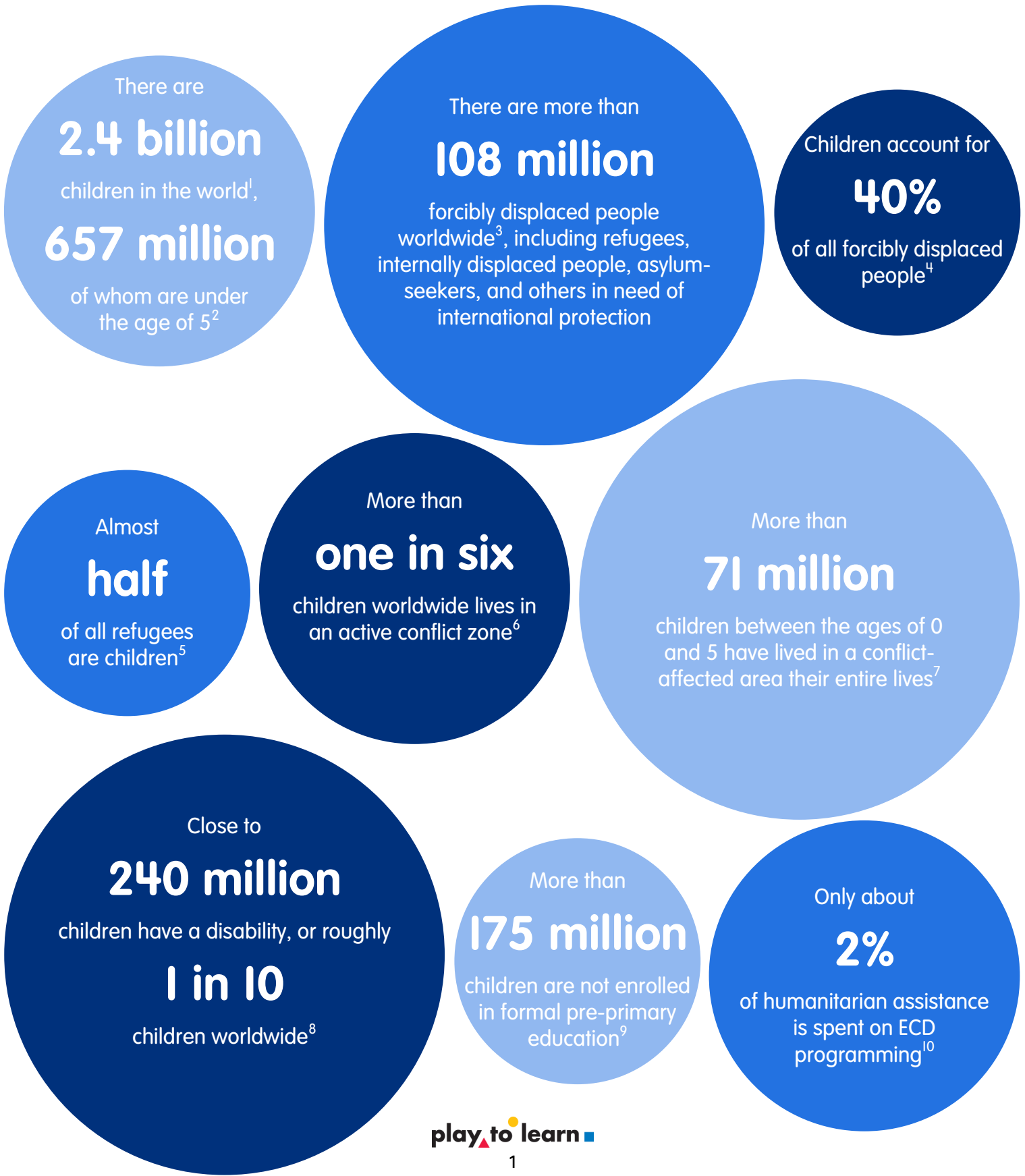
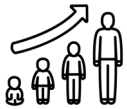


By the Numbers: Young Children and Crisis Contexts



Factsheet: Early Childhood Development and Crisis Contexts

Dollar for dollar, investments in early childhood development (ECD) are some of the most valuable bets we can make on our collective future. Elements of ECD programs such as caregiver support and playful learning can be crucial ingredients for success. This factsheet highlights key facts and statistics about ECD in crisis contexts. It is meant to be a resource for strengthening advocacy and communications products with statistics and research citations.



The Importance of The Early Years

The first eight years of life are the most important for human development.

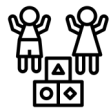
UNICEF, "Learning through Play: Strengthening learning through play in early childhood education programmes," 2018.

During a child's first three years, they can make up to one million neural connections a second, laying the foundation for lifelong learning, health, and productivity.

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, "InBrief: The Science of Early Childhood Development," 2007.

Children who are behind cognitive benchmarks when they enter elementary school are more likely to experience later educational difficulties.

Grantham-McGregor, et al., "Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries," 2007.



The Benefits of Early Childhood Development Programs

ECD programs have had short- and long-term positive effects on children living in adversity, including higher wages earned as an adult, greater educational attainment, improved cognitive abilities, reduced violence, and fewer depressive symptoms.

Nores and Barnett, "Benefits of early childhood interventions across the world: (Under) Investing in the very young," 2010.

Gertler, et al., "Labor market returns to an early childhood stimulation intervention in Jamaica," 2014.

Black, et al., "Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course," 2016.

Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), "Encouraging early childhood stimulation from parents and caregivers to improve child development," 2020.

Walker, et al., "Cognitive, psychosocial, and behaviour gains at age 31 years from the Jamaica early childhood stimulation trial," 2021.

UNICEF, "Best of UNICEF Research 2022," 2022.

Support in the early years for children and their caregivers can provide returns of up to 13 percent a year through improved education, health, legal, and economic outcomes—even after adjusting for the cost of the program. In some high-need contexts, scaling up ECD programs could have returns of investment of \$18 to \$68 for every \$1 spent through improved health, social, and economic outcomes.

García, et al., "The Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program," 2016.

UNICEF, "Best of UNICEF Research 2022," 2022.



The Effects of Conflict and Crisis

Exposure to conflict can delay early childhood development—and chronic exposure can compound this risk.

Goto, Frodl, and Skokauskas, “Armed Conflict and Early Childhood Development in 12 Low- and Middle-Income Countries,” 2021.

Exposure to conflict during early childhood can negatively impact a child’s mental health, resulting in symptoms of PTSD, behavioral and emotional problems, difficulties with healthy play, and difficulties sleeping.

Slone and Mann, “Effects of War, Terrorism and Armed Conflict on Young Children: A Systematic Review,” 2016.

Severe stress during early childhood can damage the architecture of a young child’s developing brain, leading to learning difficulties and potentially lifelong physical and mental challenges including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, “The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do,” 2007.

Prolonged exposure to violence can have a long-lasting impact on a child’s ability to process and understand emotions.

Umilta et al., “Impact of civil war on emotion recognition: the denial of sadness in Sierra Leone,” 2013.



The Scope of the Problem

Globally, one in six children lives in an active conflict zone. More than 71 million children have spent their entire lifetimes in areas affected by conflict.

Peace Research Institute Oslo, “Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990-2021,” 2022.

As of the end of 2022, there were more than 108 million people worldwide who had been forcibly displaced from their homes. This means that more than 1 in 74 people around the world have been forced to flee home. 40 percent of forcibly displaced people are children.

UNHCR, “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022,” 2023.

More than 175 million children globally are not enrolled in formal pre-primary education, a key element of early childhood development. Almost half of all countries offer no free pre-primary education.

UNICEF, “COVID-19: Trends, Promising Practices and Gaps in Remote Learning for Pre-Primary Education,” 2020.

UNESCO, “SDG 4 Scorecard: Progress Report on National Benchmarks,” 2023.



A Lack of Sufficient Funding

Globally, ECD accounts for just over 3 percent of all development assistance going to crisis-affected countries and only 2 percent of humanitarian assistance.

Moving Minds Alliance, “Analysis of international aid levels for early childhood services in crisis contexts,” 2020.

95 percent of funding directed to ECD programming worldwide is spent on health and nutrition-related interventions, leaving little left for education or other crucial topics such as water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Moving Minds Alliance, “Analysis of international aid levels for early childhood services in crisis contexts,” 2020.



The Essential Role of Caregivers

Healthy, responsive relationships with caregivers can shape the architecture of a young brain, laying a solid foundation for long-term physical and mental health.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, "The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do," 2007.

Dozens of studies show that programs that support and encourage caregivers to interact and play in healthy and stimulating ways with young children can improve children's cognitive, motor, language, and socioemotional development.

Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), "Encouraging early childhood stimulation from parents and caregivers to improve child development," 2020.

Jeong et al., "Parenting interventions to promote early child development in the first three years of life: A global systematic review and meta-analysis," 2021.

ECD programs that support caregivers in forming nurturing relationships with their children can mitigate some of the negative effects of chronic stress.

Theirworld, "Ensuring Quality Early Childhood Education for Refugee Children: A New Approach to Teacher Professional Development."

Parents often report that playing with their children is an important factor in their own happiness that strengthens their relationship with their child and helps them to de-stress.

The LEGO Foundation, "LEGO Play Well Report 2018," 2018.

Early childhood development programs that support caregivers in caring for their children can improve caregivers' own mental health as well.

J-PAL, "The Effects of a Play-Based Preschool Learning Program in Rural Ghana."

Singla, Kumbakumba, and Aboud, "Effects of a parenting intervention to address maternal psychological wellbeing and child development and growth in rural Uganda," 2015.

Husain et al., "An integrated parenting intervention for maternal depression and child development in a low-resource setting," 2021.



Healing and Learning through Play

Play can foster cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills and wellbeing.

Ginsburg et al., "The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds," 2007.

Play can help build complex abilities in children such as resilience, creativity, and self-advocacy.

Milteer et al., "The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds: focus on children in poverty," 2012.

Encouraging healthy play with caregivers can have positive effects on children up to 30 years later.

Walker, et al., "Cognitive, psychosocial, and behaviour gains at age 31 years from the Jamaica early childhood stimulation trial," 2021.

Play gives children opportunities to develop a wide variety of skills, such as making a plan, learning from trial and error, applying concepts of science to real life, communicating and negotiating, exploring their creativity and artistry, and finding satisfaction and pride from personal and group accomplishments.

UNICEF, "Learning through Play: Strengthening learning through play in early childhood education programmes," 2018.



The Need for Inclusive Programming

Close to 240 million children worldwide have some kind of disability. This is approximately 1 in 10 children worldwide.

UNICEF, “*Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*,” 2021.

Young children with disabilities are much less likely to engage in activities meant to provide early childhood stimulation or responsive care than their peers without disabilities. This is true across demographics, including children in rural and urban settings, boys and girls, and children from the poorest and wealthiest families.

UNICEF, “*Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*,” 2021.

Young children with disabilities are 25 percent less likely to attend early childhood education programs than children without disabilities. Overall, children with disabilities are 49 percent more likely to have never attended formal school compared to children who do not have disabilities.

UNICEF, “*Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities: Executive Summary*,” 2021.



The Promise of Mass Media

Locally produced educational media can increase school readiness skills in young children.

Borzekowski, “*A quasi-experiment examining the impact of educational cartoons on Tanzanian children*,” 2018.

Borzekowski et al., “*The Impact of an Educational Media Intervention to Support Children’s Early Learning in Rwanda*,” 2019.

Mass media can successfully teach young children socioemotional skills, including improving their emotional vocabulary and increasing their emotional regulation.

Foulds, “*Co-Viewing Mass Media to Support Children and Parents’ Emotional ABCs: An Evaluation of Ahlan Simsim*,” 2022.

Mass media designed to teach children socioemotional lessons can also support caregiver’s socioemotional learning when co-viewed with their children.

Foulds, “*Co-Viewing Mass Media to Support Children and Parents’ Emotional ABCs: An Evaluation of Ahlan Simsim*,” 2022.



Multi-Sectoral Returns to ECD

As an additional resource, the Moving Minds Alliance has produced a set of briefs summarizing research on the importance of the early years and outlining how ECD can be integrated into and promote the existing goals of sectors such as nutrition and gender.

Moving Minds Alliance, “*Young children in crisis settings resource kit*.”

References from front page:

- ¹ UNICEF, "[How many children are there in the world](#)," 2023.
- ² UNICEF, "[How many children are there in the world](#)," 2023.
- ³ UNHCR, "[Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022](#)," 2023.
- ⁴ UNHCR, "[Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022](#)," 2023.
- ⁵ UNHCR, "[Refugee Data Finder](#)," 2023.
- ⁶ Peace Research Institute Oslo, "[Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990-2021](#)," 2022.
- ⁷ Peace Research Institute Oslo, "[Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990-2019](#)," 2022.
- ⁸ UNICEF, "[Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities](#)," 2021.
- ⁹ UNICEF, "[COVID-19: Trends, Promising Practices and Gaps in Remote Learning for Pre-Primary Education](#)," 2020.
- ¹⁰ Moving Minds Alliance, "[Analysis of international aid levels for early childhood services in crisis contexts](#)," 2020.

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