



## A Visionary Investment in Learning Through Play

**Sesame Workshop & The LEGO Foundation Will Leverage the Power of Learning Through Play to Bring Hope & Opportunity to a Generation of Refugee Children**

The scale of the refugee crisis is staggering—right now, 68.5 million people are displaced worldwide. Among them are 28 million children. For these children, war and displacement have interrupted one of the most important pathways to early learning: **play**.

Research shows that children need play in order to learn and grow. Through activities like building toys with found objects, making art, and role-playing, children learn communication, imagination, and empathy. With these skills, children affected by conflict can thrive into adulthood and rebuild their communities.

In response to this critical situation, Sesame Workshop and the LEGO Foundation have teamed up to support millions of children and caregivers affected by the Rohingya and Syrian refugee crises, ensuring their access to the play-based learning opportunities that are vital to their well-being now and long into the future.

With an extraordinary \$100 million grant from the LEGO Foundation, we will reach displaced and host community children in Bangladesh and the Syrian response region with quality early education and learning-through-play opportunities. And by designing a scalable, replicable program, we have the potential to transform the humanitarian sector’s approach to early childhood development and establish play-based learning as a crucial aspect of supporting children affected by conflict.

**We will provide children affected by crisis with the essential building blocks of play-based early childhood development—and, in doing so, we will help them become the builders of tomorrow.**

### Two Iconic Children’s Organizations

For nearly 50 years, across 150 countries and generations of children, Sesame Workshop has created culturally relevant educational content that addresses the toughest challenges facing children around the world. Sesame’s engaging Muppets have the unique ability to impart both simple and difficult lessons, always from a child’s perspective. In 2017, the MacArthur Foundation awarded their landmark \$100 million *100&Change* grant to Sesame Workshop and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) for their program to bring early education to refugee children.

Now, the LEGO Foundation is making an equally audacious investment. The LEGO Foundation is the philanthropic arm of the LEGO Group, the creators of the iconic LEGO® brick. Through play-based projects around the world, along with research and advocacy efforts, the Foundation works to ensure that learning through play empowers children to become creative, engaged, lifelong learners.

Sesame Workshop and the LEGO Foundation began working together in 2015. We have developed entertaining, educational media content and created joyful play experiences for children and their caregivers in South Africa, India, and Mexico. Now, we are expanding our reach to bring play-based learning to millions of children impacted by displacement.





## The Program

Delivered through direct services and mass media, our program will give children and caregivers affected by refugee crises the play-based educational tools they need to overcome adversity and thrive.

### Learning Through Play

Around the world, in all cultures and contexts, play is a part of childhood—and yet, many children affected by war and displacement have very limited opportunities to play.

Playful interactions between children and caring adults are especially important for fostering children's social-emotional growth. That's why, through our direct services, we will also guide caregivers in play-based, nurturing interactions with their children. We'll give them the resources they need to actively support their children's development.

### Direct Services

In Bangladesh, we will work with BRAC, the largest international NGO in the world and a longtime LEGO Foundation partner. Together, we will scale BRAC's network of Humanitarian Play Labs, which provide vulnerable children with safe spaces for guided play. We will create fun and engaging Sesame videos, storybooks, games, puzzles, and more to foster engagement between children and their caregivers and address the developmental needs of children ages 0 to 6 from Rohingya refugee and Bangladeshi host populations.

In the Syrian response region, Sesame Workshop and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) are currently implementing the largest early childhood intervention in the history of humanitarian response. With the support of the MacArthur Foundation, we are delivering direct services in homes and centers across the region. Now, with the LEGO Foundation's support, we will deepen the play-based learning aspects of the program, enhancing our ability to reach displaced children and families with critical early education.

### Mass Media

Harnessing the power of the beloved *Sesame Street* Muppets, Sesame Workshop will create videos focused on play, which we will share through family-friendly mobile and pop-up viewings in refugee and host communities. Through our program with the LEGO Foundation, we will adapt global Sesame content—including content from *Sisimpur*, the Bangladeshi version of *Sesame Street*, and from a new Arabic-language TV series in production in the Syrian response region—to meet the unique needs of refugee and host community children. This work will build upon our recent pilot project in Cox's Bazar, generously supported by UNHCR, through which we adapted global Sesame content for Rohingya children.

Much of the new content will use animated and nonverbal formats, so that we can address the needs of displaced children no matter where they live or what language they speak.





## Research & Advocacy

The importance of play for children's development is well established, but there is little research about what sorts of play-based early childhood interventions work in humanitarian contexts. That's why we're working with our independent evaluation partners at NYU's Global TIES for Children to develop, test, and refine the best learning-through-play models.

By sharing the lessons learned from our program, we will lay the groundwork for others to scale, adapt, and build upon these models for other refugee and host communities.

**Our research will help double the existing evidence base on what early education programs are most effective in crisis settings.**

Despite clear evidence that early education interventions have immediate and long-term benefits for both children and their communities, less than 3% of all humanitarian aid goes to education in crisis contexts—and only a fraction of that goes towards early childhood education. We aim to shift this reality. In donor, NGO, government, and academic circles, we will use our high-quality research to promote the value of play-based services and encourage sustainable investment in early childhood development.

**Through robust research and advocacy efforts, we will establish play-based learning as an essential component of humanitarian response.**

**Together, we can leverage the power of play-based learning to forge a legacy for the millions of children affected by humanitarian crises around the world.**

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE, PLEASE CONTACT**

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Global TIES for Children