

Foundations of Scale: A Practical Guide to Evidence-Based Scaling Derived from Experience in Humanitarian Settings

Based on IRC's experience scaling early childhood development programs with the Ahlan Simsim initiative

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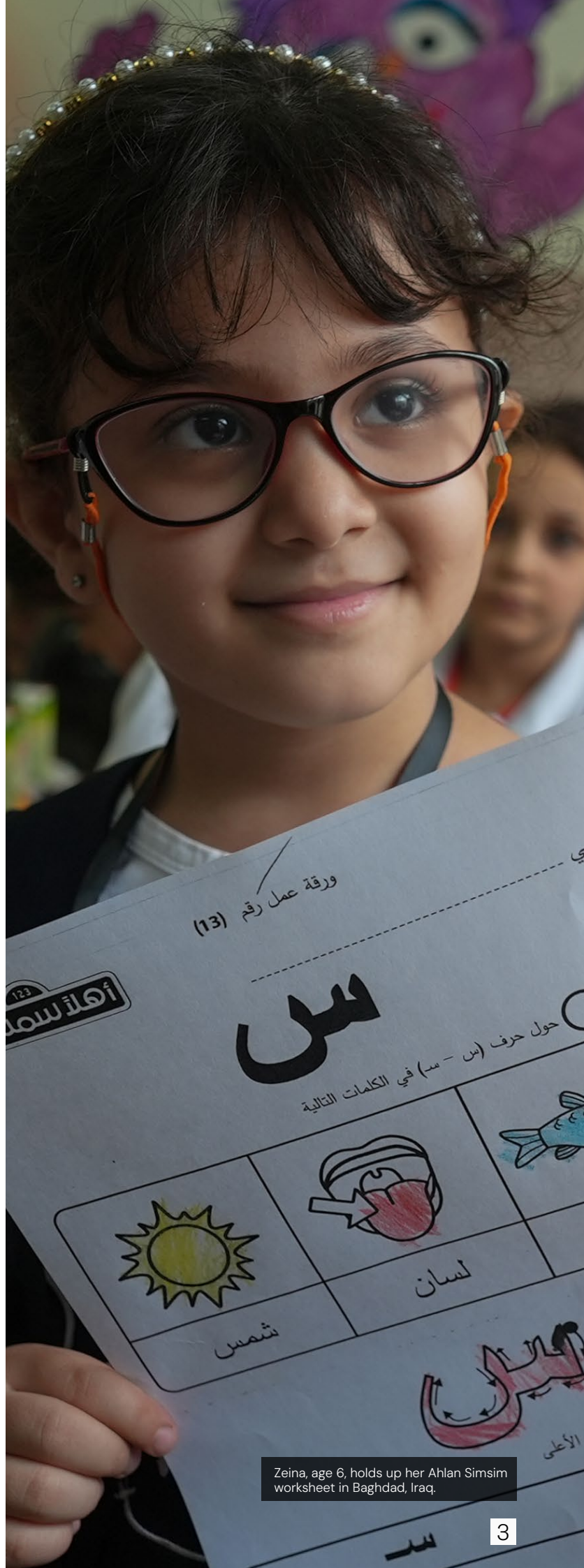


Introduction

This scaling handbook has been developed to provide practitioners with the resources needed to facilitate scaling initiatives, including details on approach and tools. It was informed by the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) experience scaling programs and services with the Ahlan Simsim (AS) initiative. Ahlan Simsim is an early childhood development (ECD) initiative launched by Sesame Workshop and the IRC in 2018 with funding from the MacArthur Foundation and LEGO Foundation. It combines educational mass media for children with direct ECD services in the MENA region.

Recognizing the critical time early childhood presents for children's brain and social development, the AS initiative aims to sustain impact on children's lives in a cost-effective, and replicable manner. The approach is tailored to and integrated into existing ECD systems across the region so that a new generation of children grow to be productive, healthy, and kind adults. Ahlan Simsim approaches scaling of early childhood outcomes through a lens of sustainability, grounded in the humanitarian-development nexus and focused on existing national systems, with special attention to the most vulnerable families from refugee and host communities. Critical to Ahlan Simsim are partnerships with governments and local ECD actors for adaptation and uptake of Ahlan Simsim offerings into national systems and structures thereby impacting younger children at scale across the region for years to come.

This handbook is a living document; it will be tested and adapted over time to reflect learning from across the IRC experience on scaling.



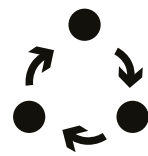
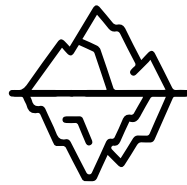
Zeina, age 6, holds up her Ahlan Simsim worksheet in Baghdad, Iraq.

Scaling Approach

What is Scaling?

According to the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution, scaling is about *expanding, deepening, and sustaining impact*, rather than growing an organization or a specific model. Scaling can occur in several ways—"from deliberate replication to organic diffusion to integration into national systems—that expand and deepen impact leading to lasting improvements in people's lives." To support successful scaling focused on ECD outcomes for children in conflict- and crisis-affected settings, the Ahlan Simsim initiative developed additional guidance focused around these three components of the CUE definition of scaling.

Success in scaling extends beyond mere reach: it encompasses the delivery of *high-quality* services that promote equitable access and necessitates substantial investments to partner with local actors to *sustain* the most effective and impactful interventions. Achieving this entails continuously gathering data for assessment, reflection, and intervention enhancement through an iterative process. This also elevates the importance of the relevant sector (ECD for Ahlan Simsim) and establishes a lasting vision in places where services are being provided, surpassing the duration of the project.



Expanding

Expanding to reach the optimal number of the target population possible.

When working with government this could mean all targeted individuals in the country. When working within a targeted areas, community, or network of CBOs it could mean reaching all individuals in a specific area or within a specific profile.

Deepening

Deepening the quality of services by working within an existing system that governs and delivers them and building on existing structures within that system.

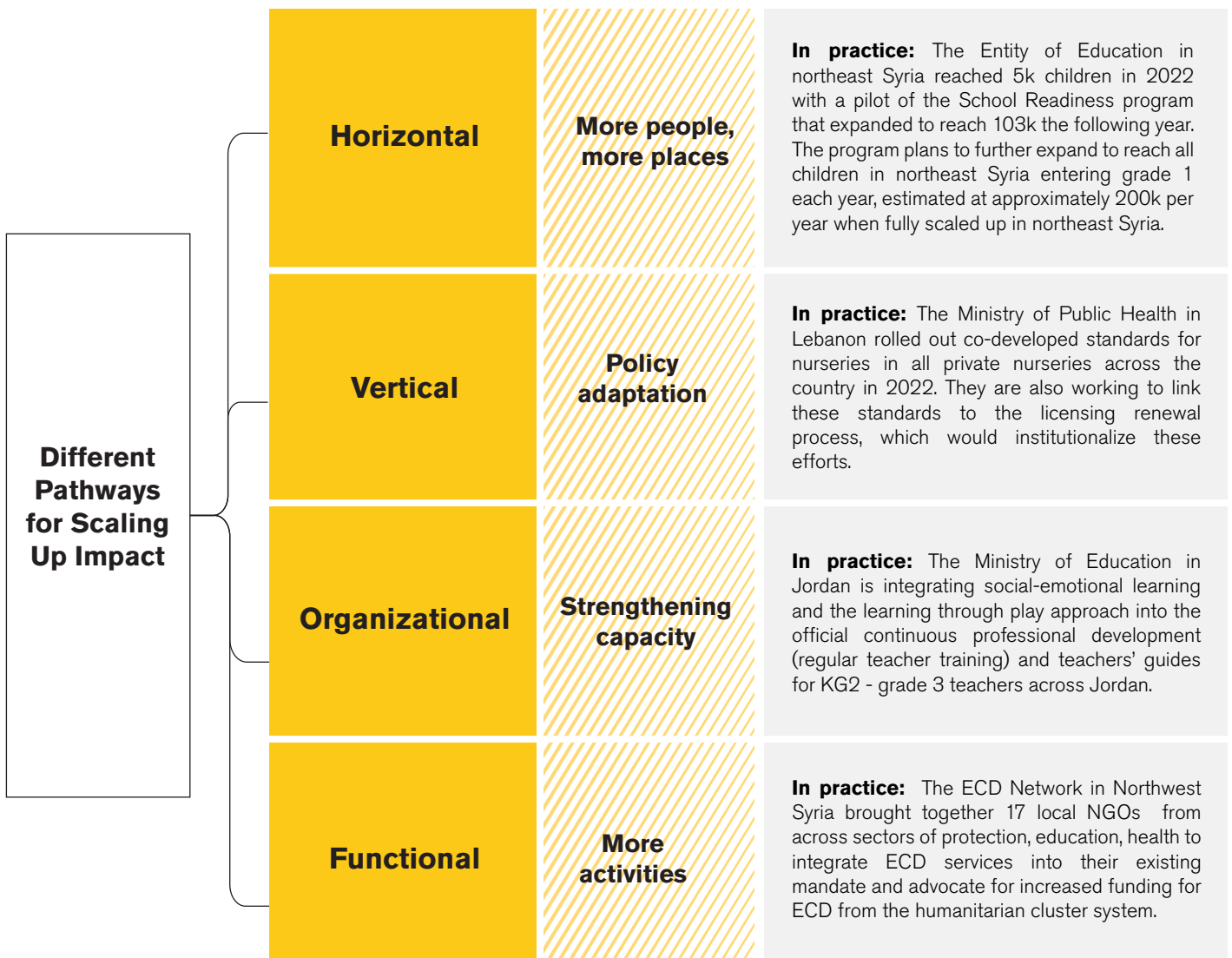
Rather than creating new services, working with partners to explore the existing system and services, and building on them.

Sustaining

Centering sustainability throughout the design and scale up phases.

Thinking beyond day one, and beyond the project, considering factors such as cost, coordination, context, and policy-level commitment from the start in collaboration with partners.

There are four types of pathways to scale that are not mutually exclusive and can therefore be pursued at the same time. These are highlighted in the image below.



A scaling pathway **can include more than one approach**: the School Readiness Program started with the Ministry of Education in Iraq in 2021 reaching 120 schools in one governorate. By 2023, it had expanded to over 7,700 schools in the all 15 governorates across Federal Iraq with the eventual aim to reach all children across all 15,000 primary schools in Iraq [horizontal scaling]. Simultaneously, teams worked with the Ministry to integrate a play-based approach into the curriculum for teacher professional development and strengthen the skills of the curriculum developers to be able to do this work [organizational scaling].

The Ahlan Simsim team partnered with a variety of stakeholders to co-develop and implement effective and contextually relevant interventions tailored to national needs as defined by partners, and as a result, Ahlan Simsim includes examples of each of these

types of pathways to scale. *For an overview of all the interventions, please refer to Annex 1: Ahlan Simsim: Scaling Quality ECD & Strengthening National Systems.*

Reference: **Millions Learning Scaling Up Quality Education in Developing Countries** by Center for Universal Education Brookings Institution

¹ Note: KG2 is the educational level immediately preceding grade 1.

	Pre-Design	Design	Pilot	Expansion	Scaling
Main activities	<p>Context analysis using different tools.</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement and identifying champions*.</p>	<p>Co-design of the pathways by identifying the problem and developing relevant interventions.</p> <p>Co-design the content and related data collection as appropriate.</p>	<p>Implementation of activities on a smaller scale.</p> <p>Extensive quantitative and qualitative data collection is mainly led by the originating organization.</p>	<p>Implementation of an iteration of the intervention reaching a bigger scale.</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative data collection is mainly led by the scaling partner.</p>	<p>Implementation is on full scale, includes policy change and or changes in processes at the scaling partner organization to facilitate this work.</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative data collection is fully led by the scaling partner.</p>

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It is essential to recognize that scaling does not follow a linear path. Rather, it involves identifying various phases that the work may progress through, allowing for adjustments and approaches that align with the evolving needs of each phase. Drawing from the experience gained from Ahlan Simsim, five key phases have been identified. It is important to acknowledge that certain phases might be bypassed, or the scaling process could revert to previous phases due to changes in the context or other causes.

Scaling Collaboratively in the Humanitarian Sector:

Scaling, as defined above, can occur in various ways, but there must be a clear intention to scale a specific impact. In humanitarian or development settings, this might involve an organization or a government entity initiating

discussions to pursue a particular outcome. We use the term originating organization to refer to the organization or entity that begins the scaling process and starts the initiative to explore solutions to be scaled within the existing system, in the case of Ahlan Simsim, this is the IRC and Sesame Workshop. An originating organization plays a crucial role in scaling work due to their expertise in a relevant technical area, the resources they have access to and their capacity to respond to humanitarian crises.

It is fundamental that problems are identified together between originating organization and local actors, and that the interventions are genuinely co-created with and by these actors. This concept underscores the notion of ownership, which will be further explored later in the document.

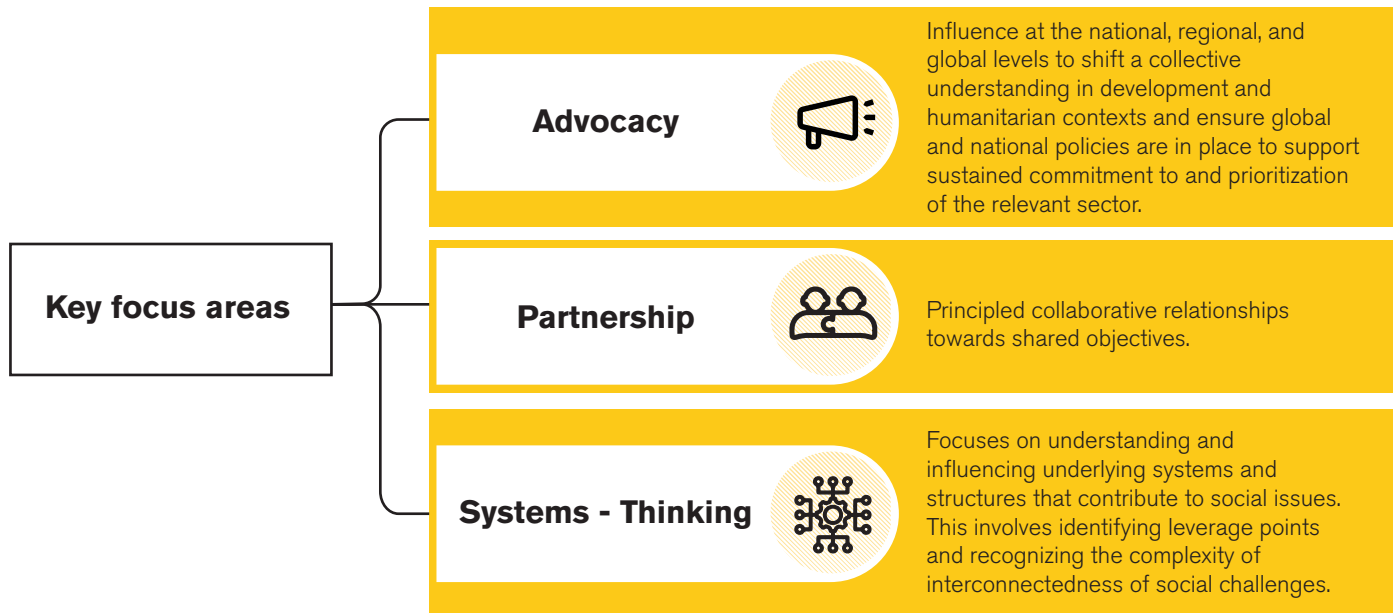
The table below describes the main phases that an originating organization and partners could undergo during the scaling journey.



***A champion** is an individual who believes in and advocates for a specific interest. They are willing to be innovative and take risks to support the integration in the national system. Champions can hold various roles: decision maker, technical focal point, influencer or – preferably – a combination of all.

Concepts with Special Considerations for Humanitarian Actors:

Working on scaling requires investment in and focus on partnerships, advocacy, and systems thinking.



While the concepts of scaling, partnerships, systems thinking, and advocacy have distinct meanings, they are interconnected, overlap, and complement each other. They are shaped by a focus on creating lasting impact centered around local communities. Scaling can be achieved through strong partnerships and grounded in a systems-approach to strengthen sustainability and local ownership. Advocacy serves as a catalyst, strengthening the collaborative efforts of scaling initiatives, partnerships, and systemic interventions. Together, these concepts converge to

form a holistic and long-lasting dynamic approach to address complex challenges.

Note: When considering scaling work that integrates advocacy and systems thinking, partnerships extend beyond bilateral ones as they require coordination, co-design and collaboration from diverse stakeholders including NGOs, INGOs, local community members (such as informal leaders, children, caregivers, youth), ministries, and private sector actors.







What is a Scaling Pathway?

A scaling pathway is a collaboratively designed solution that addresses a problem* facing the system and includes the combination of:


***The term 'problem'** is being used because it is best understood to describe barriers or obstacles that disrupt the system's functionality. This is in contrast to needs that are symptoms that manifest due to the system's underlying issues or dysfunctions.

 **How**

Articulation of the program or vehicle through which the "what" is taken up by the "who"; this could mean a program run by the Ministry of Education or materials and activities integrated into primary health clinics.

 **What**

The combination of offerings (models, materials, curricula, or trainings) being used to develop the intervention.

 **Who**

Scaling partners – the stakeholder (ministry, NGO, local actor, INGO or private sector) who will adapt, co-develop and ultimately deliver at scale and in a sustained manner.

Scaling pathways are complex and context-dependent, requiring coordination between multiple stakeholders, adequate funding and financing, and a reliance on the demand for services by the targeted communities. Scaling pathways are co-developed by the originating organization and all other relevant stakeholders.

Examples of pathways from the Ahlan Simsim initiative in Jordan and Iraq:

- **Jordan:** Expansion of access for teachers to quality early childhood education (ECE) by integrating social-emotional learning and learning through play into the existing educational services within teacher guides for KG 2 and the subject matters of math and science for grad 1 and 2 in the Ministry of Education.
- **Iraq:** Expansion of the existing Ministry of Health ECD content to include opportunities for early learning and responsive caregiving during the child wellbeing visits at the primary healthcare centers.



IRC Ambassador Sepideh Moafi engages in Ahlan Simsim activities in a center in Jordan.

Principles and Themes Based on the Ahlan Simsim Experience

Scaling is a fundamental and innovative pillar of the Ahlan Simsim program, which was implemented between 2018 and 2023 in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Northern Syria. Recognizing its value and potential impact on future similar interventions, the IRC extracted valuable insights from the scaling experience. These insights aim not only to enrich ongoing and future initiatives within the field of ECD but also to contribute to the broader humanitarian community, including scaling practitioners, governmental agencies, donors, and humanitarian implementers.

[For details on these insights generated, please refer to IRC report, "Insights from the Ahlan Simsim Scaling Journey"]

Principles are foundational guidelines that can guide decision-making across different scenarios, while insights are specific and often context-driven realizations gained from analyzing specific situations.

Scaling Principles

Principle 1: Dynamic Feedback and Reflection

Commitment to continuously gather feedback and engage in reflective practices throughout the scaling process.

Principle 2: Adaptive Agility

Intentionally adjusting strategies and approaches as new information emerges, ensuring that the scaling process remains aligned with its goals and relevant to the context.

Principle 3: Crystal Clarity

Promoting transparent and effective exchange of information among stakeholders. It encompasses different tactics to ensure that all parties are well-informed and engaged.

Principle 4: Partnerships Synergy

Establishment of partnerships characterized by equitable collaboration from the project's inception.

Principle 5: Contextual Harmony

There is no universal solution. Tailoring scaling strategies to fit the unique circumstances, needs, and challenges of the specific context in which the intervention is being implemented.

Themes, Takeaways and Recommended Tactics

6 themes identified:

1. Understanding the System
2. Ownership
3. Collaborative Partnership
4. Adaptive Management
5. Co-Design for scale
6. Investment for scale

1

Build and maintain an understanding of the system, its context, and its culture.

Learnings and takeaways:

The development of a deep and comprehensive understanding of the context, encompassing its complex dimensions and details is a foundation of scaling. Without it, the impact of scale is at risk. This understanding includes an assessment of the readiness to scale by all partners engaged in the scaling efforts. Commitment to a problem that is relevant to the context is fundamental to designing solutions for scale and originating organizations must be dedicated to adapting support to accommodate for contextual changes.

Recommended tactics:

- Establish an environment that fosters the skills required for understanding the context: Including nurturing analytical thinking, diverse perspectives, continuous learning, effective communication, empathy, autonomy and learning from mistakes. Such an environment empowers individuals to grasp the complexities of a situation comprehensively, leading to more informed decisions, innovative solutions, and successful outcomes.
- Put in place a system that continuously records achievements, highlights major occurrences and reflects on and adapts to the changes in context or intervention: Implement a feedback-driven approach by conducting regular reflection sessions, actively engaging stakeholders to assess, and use gathered insights to drive relevant and effective adjustments.
- Ensure adequate time to study the context: Enhance context comprehension by incorporating at least an additional six-month timeframe within the project proposal, dedicated to comprehensive research, community engagement, and relationship-building, thereby ensuring well-informed planning, and mitigating the rush to implement without sufficient contextual understanding.



Relevant tool(s)

- **Scalability Assessment Tool**
- **Risk Analysis Tool**

Iraqi children engage in playful learning during the school readiness program.



2

Cultivate local ownerships for sustainable scaling of outcomes.

Learnings and takeaways:

Ownership is strengthened by actively making design decisions together, identifying and cultivating champions and ensuring distributed support. It emphasizes the pivotal role of people and relationships in this process which are nurtured by trust and alignment with existing priorities to ultimately lead to distributed ownership and institutional support.



Relevant tool(s)

- Design Process
- Scaling Plan Template

Recommended tactics:

- Offer/organize workshops, focus groups, and collaborative design sessions to gather input, co-create solutions, and build consensus. Provide capacity-building opportunities for all partners to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to actively contribute.
- Identify, cultivate, and support multiple champions at different levels of the institution (decision makers and service providers).
- Foster open and transparent communication channels to build trust among all stakeholders.
- Create platforms for regular updates, feedback collection, and collaborative problem-solving.
- Engage in conversations that revolve around existing structures, local strategies, and policies to align interventions with them.



IRC Country Director for Iraq joins children participating in the Ministry of Education school readiness program.

3

Dedicate efforts to establish equitable collaborative partnerships from the start.

Learnings and takeaways:

Collaboration is key, and it starts from the outset with active co-design, regular “pause and reflect” to allow for flexibility and inform changes beyond the intervention, considering opportunities for quick wins while working towards long-term solutions as well as enhancing visibility to foster equal partnerships and amplify scaling efforts. Designing for sustainability involves considerations related to the collaboration between partners such as long-term financing, gradually diminishing the originating organization’s role, and working within existing systems instead of creating new ones.

Recommended tactics:

- Involve partners from the start, ensuring their input is sought and valued during the initial planning stages, even before the co-design.
- Develop a shared vision statement that outlines the goals and objectives of the initiative, reflecting the collective aspirations of all parties involved.
- Co-create a detailed yet flexible scaling intervention plan that outlines activities, milestones, roles and timelines based on the input and insights of partners.
- Consider the following points when looking into collaboration around Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning (MEL): a) existing systems for collecting, analyzing, reporting, and learning from data on reach

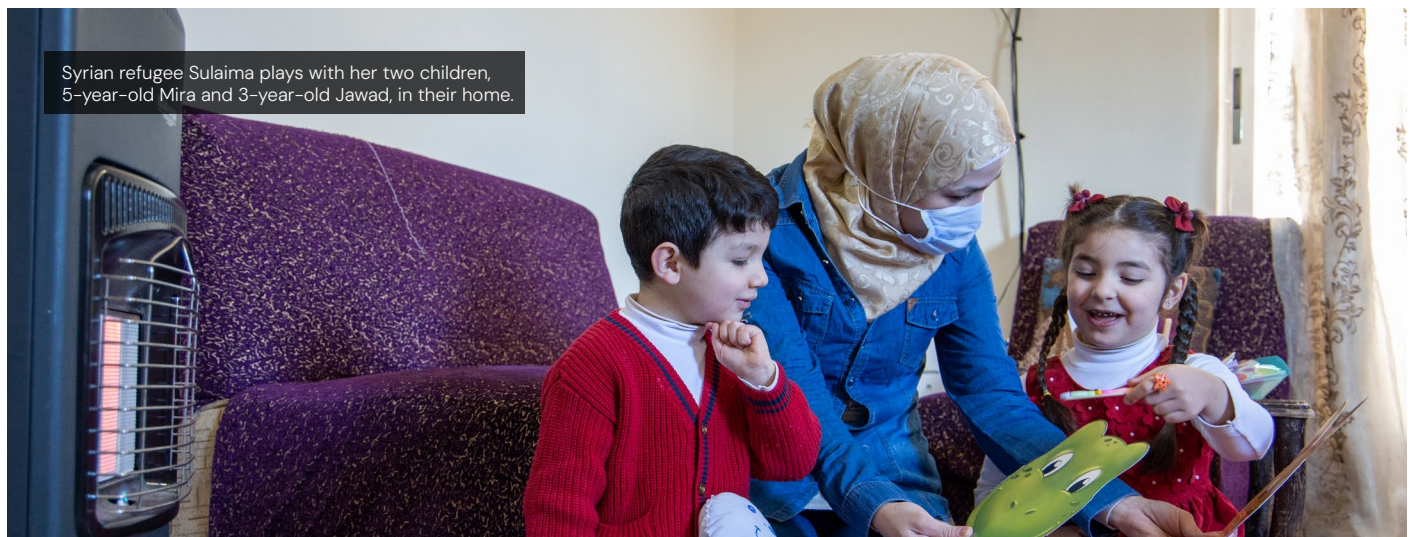
and quality of services, b) partners may not use the same terminology and c) financial resources available for MEL.

- Nurture a culture that emphasizes transparent relationships and embraces inclusive decision-making and shared accountability, while also establishing mechanisms and platforms that actively embody these principles.
- Develop original, context-specific content rooted in the local culture, needs, and vision, emphasizing quality whether created from scratch or based on existing models.
- Ensure the originating organization clearly mentions partners and attributes their contributions, in every relevant communication. Collaboratively develop and disseminate communication materials that highlight the partnership’s achievements and goals.



Relevant tool(s)

- **Design Process**
- **Scaling Readiness Assessment Tool**



Syrian refugee Sulaima plays with her two children, 5-year-old Mira and 3-year-old Jawad, in their home.

4

Adopt an adaptive management* approach in real time.



***Adaptive management** is an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context. It is not about changing goals during implementation; it is about changing the path being used to achieve the goals in response to changes².

Recommended tactics:

- Ensure staff members responsible for operational aspects have a clear understanding of scaling and the significance of adaptive management when collaborating with partners.
- Secure support and buy in from senior management of the originating organization and partners for the intervention and the team leading the work from both organizations.
- Establish mechanisms for all partners to provide feedback on challenges and opportunities. Regular feedback loops can help identify bottlenecks and suggest improvements, allowing for iterative adjustments that gradually reduce rigidity.
- Embed flexibility considerations within partnership agreements. Clearly outline the expectations for adaptive management and collaboratively develop contingency plans.
- Foster a culture of open and honest dialogue and schedule regular meetings to discuss progress, challenges, and updates.

Learnings and takeaways:

The originating organization's commitment to adaptive management involves engaging operations staff to overcome the rigidity of internal procedures, fostering a collective problem-solving environment, and gaining endorsement from senior management. Coupled with donor flexibility that prioritizes results over rigid procedures, these elements create an enabling environment for adaptive management and successful scaling.



Relevant tool(s)

- **Scaling Operational plan**



Reem, age 6, enjoys playful activities at home with IRC volunteer, Radia.

² <https://usaidlearninglab.org/community/blog/what-adaptive-management>

5

Develop systems*-influenced solutions for effective scaling.



***Systems thinking** is a set of analytic approaches and associated tools that seek to understand how systems behave, interact with their environment, and influence each other. Common to all these approaches is a conviction that actions and outcomes are best understood in terms of interactions between elements in the system.

Learnings and takeaways:

Effective scaling involves identifying, understanding, and collaboratively addressing systemic challenges and programmatic needs while aligning scaling discussions around the overarching vision rather than becoming entangled in the specifics of activities or interventions, which may experience significant modifications.

Recommended tactics:

- Clearly communicate within the team and partner teams the rationale behind adopting a systems approach, emphasizing how it leads to more holistic and sustainable solutions.
- Prioritize long-term goals, provide needed funding and support adaptive management; secure support and endorsement from organizational leaders who can advocate for a system approach.
- Seek funding that allows for flexibility and is long-term.
- Set a strategy that shifts the role of the originating organization and gradually diminishes it.
- Implement adaptive management practices that allow for continuous learning and adjustment. (Refer to relevant section above)



Relevant tool(s)

- Scalability Assessment Tool
- Risk Analysis Tool
- Scaling Plan



6-year-old Faisal plays with stickers while completing an Ahlan Simsim activity.

6

Allocate resources to facilitate scaling with strategic investments of the originating organization.

Learnings and takeaways:

Governance and coordination take time, effort, and resources from all scaling partners and it is important for originating organizations to tailor internal management processes - including a knowledge management system - to accommodate for that and to optimize resources. To ensure this is possible, originating organizations must consider staff member capacity for working on scaling. Recruiting and enhancing the capabilities of staff members in areas such as systems thinking, strong networking and communication skills, and strategic thinking can facilitate the development of collaborative partnerships and effective scaling.

Recommended tactics:

- Conduct thorough assessments of the needs and capacities of the system and engage stakeholders from the beginning. Ensure the allocation of adequate time and resources to do so.
- Recruit staff based on key skills and invest in the capacity of staff working on scaling- especially soft skills that are required for working in partnership with local actors such as but not limited to negotiation, analysis, public speaking, and reflection.
- Establish a standardized and comprehensive data/knowledge management system for thorough documentation and information compilation to facilitate the seamless transfer of organizational knowledge among team members.
- Invest in internal management and processes to tailor approaches so that they align with context-specific needs optimizing the resources management effectively.
- Invest in community outreach and advocacy for the outcome to spark interest and generate buy-in and commitment from the scaling partner and communities.



Relevant tool(s)

- **Scaling Readiness Assessment Tool**
- **Risk Analysis Tool**
- **Scaling Operational Plan**



5-year-old Saeed, who has Down Syndrome, joyfully participates in an Ahlan Simsim activity.

Team Structure and Roles

Scaling work involves a complex and multifaceted process that necessitates the collaboration of a multidisciplinary team. This team works cohesively and in close coordination with the partner organizations to achieve the objectives of scaling projects effectively.

Within this cross-functional team, individuals assume different roles and responsibilities that evolve over time as the scaling project progresses. A few examples of roles that would be part of such teams are the Project Coordinator who oversees planning and execution, the logistics team members who manage the efficient flow of resources, the technical experts provide specialized knowledge on specific areas, scaling and partnership focal point who manages the relationship with partners and ensure a focus on the system, the MEL team members who track project progress and impact etc. These diverse roles collectively contribute to the team's adaptability and effectiveness as they navigate the complexities of scaling initiatives. As the project develops, new challenges and opportunities emerge, requiring team members to adjust their roles and strategies accordingly. Effective collaboration among diverse teams striving to achieve scaling objectives is vital. They must coordinate their efforts and exchange knowledge to refine their work and tailor their approach to align with the scaling strategy.

Exact roles will change from an organization to another but the following skills are crucial for teams working on scaling:

- Effective communication and negotiation
- Collaboration
- Adaptability
- Problem solving, innovation and creativity

- Data collection and analysis to drive learnings and inform evidence-based decisions (for MEL staff members)
- Networking

Example on the evolution of teams from the Ahlan Simsim experience: Ahlan Simsim planned to scale with government partnerships from the start, anticipating initial program delivery by IRC and local NGO partners, eventually transitioning to a focus on scaling with government ministries. However, the route to do this was less clear and over time, project leadership recognized the need to resource the scaling and partnership component of Ahlan Simsim with dedicated staff – both with a Scaling Lead at the regional level as well as dedicated Scaling staff members in each country. This change in team structure to include scaling and partnerships staff was a critical inflection point without which none of the Ahlan Simsim scaling successes would have been possible. Furthermore, during the establishment of relationships between Ahlan Simsim and scaling partners, engagement was limited to team members focusing on scaling and with time and the realization that wider support would be of added value, the team widened this net of staff members engaging in relationships with scaling partners. This also included the country leadership teams' involvement after realizing the crucial role they could play.

Tip for humanitarian actors: Considering the tight timelines typical of conventional project financing, enhancing the skills of both newly formed teams and national stakeholders could prove difficult. Developing and working on a strategy that incorporates scaling efforts before securing specific funding might offer a way for organizations to navigate this obstacle. However, it is important to acknowledge that Ahlan Simsim did not follow this method, making it a theoretical suggestion. The practicality and effectiveness of such a strategy remain to be evaluated.



Children listen for instructions for their next Ahlan Simsim activity at a center in Lebanon.

Scaling Tools

Tools are essential for teams to monitor, evaluate, and document the scaling process. These tools serve to track various stages of the scaling process, providing valuable data and insights that enable continuous learning and improvements. By assessing the impact of different strategies and documenting the outcomes and challenges, teams can make informed decisions and adapt their approach as needed. Importantly, these tools foster adaptive management, allowing teams to respond promptly to changing circumstances and optimize their strategies for successful scaling. Collaboration between the scaling partners and the originating organization in the application of these tools ensures a cohesive and comprehensive approach, maximizing the potential for sustainable growth. The analysis of these tools should be tackled in reflection meetings that will allow the partner and the originating organization to reflect on the journey and develop learning on a regular basis.

Throughout the Ahlan Simsim scaling work, various tools were created to assess, track, document, and plan. However, the intricacy of these tools combined with the novelty of the scaling concept for the IRC teams and the partner organizations resulted in a steep learning curve as they had to grasp various concepts all at once. This complexity made the tools challenging to use consistently and the benefits were not always apparent.

The initial set of tools were informed by existing scaling toolkits and handbooks, adapted from existing IRC tools or developed based on needs communicated from the teams.

After the Ahlan Simsim pilot and reflection on the initial set of tools, the tools were refined to ensure the enhanced tools are practical and effective. The IRC recommends using the following tools:

Assess		
Tool	Objective	Frequency
<u>Scaling Readiness Assessment Tool</u>	This tool supports teams self-assess their readiness to scale as they embark on a scaling journey. The results will identify a set of areas of improvement pertinent to four themes: 1) Context Relevance; 2) Technical Expertise; 3) Ease of Integration; and 4) Responsiveness and Agility. Once identified, an improvement action plan will be developed to improve knowledge, capacities, tools, and overall systems to ensure that the team succeeds in working on scaling interventions with key partners.	At the beginning of the scaling work Annually
<u>Scalability Assessment Tool</u>	This tool facilitates systematic and analytical decision-making to pursue specific scaling interventions that expand and deepen the reach and impact of a given outcome. It enables the scaling team to assess the scalability and sustainability of a pathway against different criteria and co-develop with the partner a plan to overcome challenges.	After the design meeting Annually (preferably bi-annually)
<u>Risk Analysis Tool</u>	This tool is an overarching tool completed once for all scaling pathways. The tool enables the scaling team to assess the likelihood and impact of internal and external risks related to scaling and develop mitigation strategies to support scaling work.	After the design meeting, Annually or if there is a major shift in the context

Design and Document

Tool	Objective	Frequency
<u>Design Process</u>	The aim of the design process is to identify the main problem facing the system and to collaboratively discuss and develop shared objectives, strategies, scaling activities, and the overall scaling pathway.	At the beginning of the scaling work
<u>Scaling Plan</u>	This tool describes all the work that partners have agreed on in the design meeting, it ensures smooth coordination and consistency in communication externally and internally by all involved parties.	Ad hoc [beginning of scaling work- during reflection meetings- to present scaling work internally and externally]
<u>Scaling Operational Plan</u>	This tool documents the implementation process of scaling including the activities, milestones and progress as originally set in the workplan and integrates the changes agreed upon with the partner. This is an overarching tool for all scaling pathways.	On a biweekly basis to coordinate internal scaling efforts

Evaluate

Tool	Objective	Frequency
<u>Evaluation Tool</u>	This tool facilitates a comprehensive evaluation of the scaling work at the end of a specific project, comparing the outcomes with the initial vision. It allows partners to reflect on their achievements thus far and gain a better understanding of the entire scaling process retrospectively. Additionally, it offers partner organizations directions for growth, enabling them to make informed decisions.	Stage 1: Before the end of the main project that is funding the scaling initiative or when the intervention is completed. Stages 2&3: At the end of the project or when the intervention is completed after finalizing internally step 1.

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The development of this handbook and the AS approach to scaling was influenced and informed by the following:

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Ahlan Simsim: Scaling Quality ECD & Strengthening National Systems

Ahlan Simsim is an early childhood development (ECD) initiative of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Sesame Workshop. It aims to restore hope and opportunity for a generation, ensuring that children aged 0 to 8 affected by conflict and crisis in the MENA region are supported with cost-effective, adaptable, and contextualized ECD solutions that are scaled and sustained for long-term impact. Ahlan Simsim leverages the power of educational mass media alongside direct services and programs integrated across **education, health, and social development** sectors, to support children's healthy development and set them on a path to a brighter future.

Contextually relevant ECD solutions, which are co-developed and implemented with national partners, focus on meeting the national needs of young children and on strengthening the systems which support them. We use the term "scaling pathway" to represent these solutions. Each scaling pathway is comprised of the lead system actor for scaling, the solutions that are being scaled, and the channel

through which a solution is delivered within the system (e.g., integration into existing health clinics, daycares, or primary school classrooms). The portfolio of Ahlan Simsim scaling pathways aims to expand and deepen ECD impact and strengthen existing systems to create sustained change in children's lives. Across Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, Ahlan Simsim teams collaborate with a variety of partners to embed support for ECD into national infrastructure and institutionalize ECD as a shared priority. The following pages provide summaries of the variety of scaling pathways across the Ahlan Simsim initiative. Note that estimates for "Annual Reach at Scale" refer to the number of children a scaling pathway would optimally reach when considered "at scale". This is defined as the total population of children who can be reached via that channel; for example, if a solution is being scaled via public health clinics, the annual reach at scale is the total population of children in the targeted age range who access those services annually.



IRC Ambassador Sepideh Moafi engages in Ahlan Simsim activities in a center in Jordan.

Iraq

IRAQ

Education

Vision: Quality early childhood education led by the **Ministry of Education** is enhanced with strengthened services which include social-emotional and learning through play resources.

Current Intervention: 2-week school readiness program that eases the transition into primary school. The program is implemented by teachers during the first two weeks of the school year for grade 1 students. Currently working with the ministry on the integration of social-emotional learning focused resources into the full year curriculum for first three years of school by supporting the capacity building of the curriculum developers.

Annual Reach at Scale: All children who enter grade 1 every year in Iraq (approximately 965k).

Achievements/Status: Readiness program piloted in 2021 in 119 schools, reaching 7k children, expanded in 2022 to 1,800 schools across Federal Iraq, reaching 77k children and in 2023 to reach 388k children. Ministry committed to inclusion of readiness program in national education plan, mandating implementation of the program nation-wide. 30 curriculum developers were trained and developed activities that include SEL and LtP.

Health

Vision: ECD resources and support are integrated into services led by the **Ministry of Health** in their primary health centers in Iraq, ensuring high levels of ECD knowledge among health care providers and caregivers of children aged 0-8 years.

Current Intervention: ECD resources and support integrated into primary health centers run by the Ministry, with information and guidance for parents delivered during well-child visits (ages 0-8 years) and play-based interactive physical activity spaces ("ECD corners") installed in waiting areas.

Annual Reach at Scale: All children under 6 in Iraq who access public health services, an estimate of 1.27 million children per year.

Achievements/Status: 155 doctors, nurses and midwives were trained on ECD content across all governorates and 85 of those trained will cascade the training to reach all Primary Healthcare Centers. ECD corners have been installed in clinics in Mousel, Karbala and Babel. The intervention reached 230k children and caregivers so far.

Social Development

Vision: **Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs** actors at national and governorate levels are equipped with knowledge and skills necessary to advocate for prioritization of quality ECD services for children aged 0-8 years, tailored to each local governorate's needs.

Current Intervention: Provision of support to Ministry partners under the Child Welfare Commission (CWC) to increase ECD knowledge, resources, and capacity-strengthening opportunities to conduct targeted advocacy. Child and family welfare policies and services, existing and new, take into consideration the needs of children aged 0-8 years.

Annual Reach at Scale: This intervention focuses on policy and advocacy; reach to be determined as the result of advocacy work becomes entrenched.

Achievements/Status: 29 CWC focal points from 15 governorates in Federal Iraq have been trained on ECD and advocacy tactics, with workplans for prioritization of ECD underway across all 15 governorates.

Jordan

JORDAN

Education

Vision: Quality early childhood education led by the **Ministry of Education** is enhanced by strengthening existing services with social-emotional and learning through play resources for teachers and students for KG2 and grades 1-3.

Current Intervention: 3-week school readiness program implemented by teachers prior to the start of the school year for grade 1 students to ease the transition into primary school. This comes alongside in-process integration of core Ahlan Simsim social-emotional and learning through play resources into teacher professional development and teacher resources, to influence wider teaching across KG2-grade 2 beyond the school readiness program.

Annual Reach at Scale: Estimated at all children entering grade 1, approximately 120k children per year.

Achievements/Status: The school readiness program reached close to 4k children in 2022, and integration of social-emotional and learning through play components into teacher guides for KG2 and science and math for grade 1 and 2, reached 365k children.

Health

Vision: Awareness, knowledge, and provision of resources that promote ECD practices among health care providers with the **Ministry of Health** is increased to be shared with caregivers and their children during health appointments.

Current Intervention: ECD knowledge and tips are incorporated into health provider training with accompanying resources. Health providers (nurses and midwives) deliver this information and guidance for parents during regular well-child visits for children aged 0-5 years. This is complemented with installation of physical ECD corners in waiting areas.

Annual Reach at Scale: All children accessing healthcare centers across Jordan (estimated at approximately 150k per year); available data indicates approx. 60% of children in Jordan are seen for check-ups in Ministry-run health clinics.

Achievements/Status: 40 Ministry staff equipped as master trainers, later cascading the training to reach 187 midwives reaching 815k children by December 2023. The program now has widespread support from the Ministry, which has plans to expand aiming to scale up the program to support close 36% of children up to age five in the Kingdom by end of 2024 and the training is integrated in the ministry promotion system for all health workers.

Social Development

Vision: The quality of nurseries and daycares in Jordan adhere to a set of high quality, holistic standards and are endorsed by key ECD actors in Jordan led by the **National Council of Family Affairs**.

Current Intervention: Tailored Quality Management System (QMS) has been co-developed and made available to daycares and nurseries to monitor practices in addition to certification licensing and in-service training for staff.

Annual Reach at Scale: All children accessing daycares in Jordan (approximately 15k).

Achievements/Status: QMS was piloted in selected nurseries and made available via the Ministry's learning and resources platform. The in-service training has been reviewed, finalized, and endorsed by the Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission.

Lebanon

Mediterranean Sea

LEBANON

Education

Vision: Quality of the formal curriculum, overseen by the **Ministry of Education & Higher Education** and implemented in formal education services, is improved to include social-emotional learning and learning through play components.

Current Intervention: Ahlan Simsim social-emotional learning and learning through play activities integrated into the Ministry's on-line and in-person formal education services.

Annual Reach at Scale: Children entering grade 1 in public schools; notes that this number continues to fluctuate as the national economic context shifts.

Achievements/Status: Digital program resources have been uploaded to the Ministry's digital learning platform for online access and two consultants supported the curriculum development committees. Ahlan Simsim materials were integrated in SEL toolboxes that reached 79k children.

Health

Vision: Quality ECD is institutionalized in private nurseries across Lebanon and is overseen by the **Ministry of Public Health**, to improve the well-being of children aged 0-5 by ensuring healthy, child-friendly, inclusive, and safe services.

Current Intervention: Comprehensive quality standards covering eight domains from infrastructure to governance and curriculum to serve as accreditation system for private nurseries. "Under Three Years" was developed to support nurseries to achieve standards.

Annual Reach at Scale: All children entering nurseries overseen by the Ministry each year in Lebanon (approximately 25k).

Achievements/Status: Standards have been launched as of June 2022 and assessment finalized. A curriculum targeted to the needs of children under three years has been finalized. The intervention reached 14k children.

Social Development

Vision: Quality ECD is institutionalized in **Ministry of Social Affairs**-run public daycares across Lebanon to improve the well-being of children aged 0-5 years, spearheaded by the Ministry, by ensuring healthy, child-friendly, inclusive, and safe services.

Current Intervention: Comprehensive quality standards covering eight domains from infrastructure to governance and curriculum to be implemented in all daycares.

Annual Reach at Scale: With the current crisis in Lebanon and impacts on economy, this number is being reassessed.

Achievements/Status: Standards are finalized, and an assessment was developed and implemented by social workers working in the Ministry. This pathway reached 1.5k children. Even in the face of this uncertainty and limited reach, this avenue to reach children is important since Ministry-run nurseries reach one of the most vulnerable groups of children in Lebanon.

Northern Syria

Mediterranean Sea

SYRIA

Education

Vision: Quality early childhood education with the **Entity of Education (EoE)** in the northeast region of Syria is enhanced by strengthening existing services with social-emotional and learning through play resources.

Current Intervention: 2-week school readiness program implemented by teachers during the first two weeks of the school year for grade 1 students, to ease the transition into primary school and bolster preparatory education opportunities. Content development for KG3 is in process.

Annual Reach at Scale: All children entering grade 1 (estimated at approx. 200k per year) in the northeast region of Syria.

Achievements/Status: Program has been piloted in 71 schools in 3 districts of the region, led by the Entity and reached close to 5k children. The readiness program was reviewed and translated into Kurdish to ensure inclusion of all children. In 2023 the readiness program expanded to reach 104k children.

Social Development

Vision: Increased access for children and their caregivers to quality ECD resources and services available through centers run by the **Entity of Municipalities (EoM)**.

Current Intervention: A co-designed ECD program targeting children and their caregivers. The program is influenced by existing Ahlan Simsim program models, tailored to address the needs of families in northeast Syria. It is implemented by entity center facilitators in municipalities and is supported with training and coordinating resources.

Annual Reach at Scale: Still to be determined.

Achievements/Status: Two Ahlan Simsim modular, flexible programs (Ahlan Simsim Friends targeting children and Ahlan Simsim Families targeting caregivers) were piloted in the Derek Municipality, reaching over 500 children in 2022. The intervention was reviewed, and IRC and EoM teams are currently developing adaptations to the program content which is tailored and contextualized to meet the needs of children in northeast Syria.

Social Development

Vision: Daycare workers with the local **Entity of Women (EoW)** are well-equipped with knowledge, skills, and resources on holistic and high quality ECD care.

Current Intervention: A co-created ECD program, tailored to address the gaps defined by the local authority, is implemented by daycare workers supported with training and coordinating resources. The program is influenced by existing Ahlan Simsim program models.

Annual Reach at Scale: Currently being assessed.

Achievements/Status: Piloted the Ahlan Simsim modular, flexible programs (Ahlan Simsim Friends targeting children and Ahlan Simsim Families targeting caregivers) in three centers run by local authorities, reaching close to 800 children in 2022. Through evaluation of the pilot, IRC and EoE of Women teams adapted the content to best fit needs of children in northeast Syria.

Cross-sectoral

Vision: ECD is prioritized in programming in the northwest part of Syria; **Syrian ECD Network** (of member NGOs) is leading ECD programs, advocacy, and fundraising for the region.

Current Intervention: Equipping local NGOs in northwest Syria with organizational and technical capacity to lead on ECD advocacy and programming.

Annual Reach at Scale: Optimally, through the work of the Syrian ECD Network, all children benefitting from involved NGOs would access ECD services; numbers to be determined.

Achievements/Status: 19 NGO members have joined the Network with governance structures in place; advocacy in Education and Protection sectors has led to the increased inclusion in Humanitarian Cluster system priorities.



6-year-old Bailsan concentrates on completing an Ahlan Simsim activity book.

