

BRIEF ON LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE WORK OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN EMERGENCIES (ECDiE) COORDINATORS¹ AT THE COUNTRY OR CRISIS LEVEL

Case Study: Colombia Inclusion of ECDiE in Needs Assessments and the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) July 2022

Learning Cohort with ECDiE Coordinators: [Sesame Workshop](#) and the [Humanitarian Collaborative at the University of Virginia](#) (UVA) are partnering to better understand success factors and challenges in the roles that ECD coordinators can play in supporting the coordination of early childhood development (ECD) services in crisis contexts. Together, we have launched a [learning cohort](#) comprised of individuals supporting ECD coordination in Bangladesh, Colombia, Jordan, and Lebanon to generate learnings from their work and to share these learnings with key stakeholders. We are also generating insights on why and how humanitarian actors, donors, and host governments should invest in deploying ECD coordinators in other contexts to strengthen ECD coordination in humanitarian response globally.

Why Including ECD in Humanitarian Needs Assessments Matters

As previous studies show², while a growing number of countries and humanitarian organizations have prioritized early childhood development (ECD), evidence shows that globally only two percent of humanitarian funding goes to ECD.³ Therefore, there remains a need for increased advocacy at global and national levels for more explicit inclusion of ECDiE in mainstream humanitarian assessment and funding documents such as country-level United Nations (UN) Needs Assessment and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP).

One critical step in achieving this is to ensure that ‘Needs Assessments’ include explicit references to ECD components, defined in the [Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development](#) as good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving, and opportunities for early learning. Needs assessments are coordinated multi-sectoral processes that bring together different actors and provide the evidence base to build the annually issued Humanitarian Response Plans in a crisis context. Ensuring provision and inclusion of questions that track the data on the specific requirements of young children and pregnant and breastfeeding women is critical to ensure their needs are outlined and funding is requested at the appropriate levels in HRPs.

HRPs,⁴ which can have crisis specific names (such as Colombia’s Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan), are prepared for a protracted or sudden onset emergency that requires UN-coordinated international humanitarian assistance. The plan articulates the shared vision and the related funding requirements to respond to the assessed and expressed needs of the affected population.

HRPs are the ‘go-to’ documents for donors and policymakers. If there is no mention of ECD in the HRP, funding decisions and related action on the specific needs of young children and their caregivers are likely to be piecemeal and poorly joined up. Inclusion in HRPs also helps generate discussions with government which, in turn, increases the likelihood of the state taking up and sustaining ECD initiatives beyond the emergency phase/context, and the integration of ECD in recovery and development planning processes and documents.

1 The term “ECDiE” in this document is used as shorthand for early childhood development in emergencies and contexts affected by conflict and crisis more broadly. The term “ECDiE Coordinator” refers to individuals supporting ECD coordination within and/or across clusters/sectors at the country or crisis level. This is not a formal “coordinator” position within the cluster system (i.e., not a cluster coordinator). The coordinator role varies according to context. For example, the role could be leading a cross-cluster ECD Working Group, or representing ECD in a coordination body focusing on other cross-cutting themes such as disability inclusion, or coordinating ECD services within a cluster, etc.

2 Such as the Technical Scan of UN Covid 19 GHRP, conducted by Sesame Workshop and UVA Humanitarian Collaborative, which demonstrated a gap in prioritization of early childhood, nurturing care and parenting, as well as the potential funding of services targeting young children’s development.

3 <https://movingmindsalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/analysis-of-international-aid-levels-for-early-childhood-services-in-crisis-contexts.pdf>

4 Sometimes also called Regional Response Plans if they cover more than one country in a geographic region

ECDiE coordinators and others should find out who in their crisis context is in charge of drafting these plans and advocate for inclusion of language in the narrative element, specifically highlighting the need for a comprehensive cluster/sector approach to ECDiE.

This brief focuses on some of the lessons learned by the Sesame Workshop-affiliated ECDiE Coordinator and the ECDiE Working Group in Colombia in increasing inclusion of ECD in data collection and needs assessments used to develop HRP. Specifically, the focus is on efforts to influence the Interagency Group for Mixed Migration (GIFMM in its Spanish acronym) and the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP), both of which are related to the Venezuelan migrant/refugee crisis.⁵

Key Takeaways: Lessons Learned and Actions ECDiE Coordinators and Others Can Take

- Partner with UNICEF or another UN Agency to create an inter-sectoral ECD Working Group:** Since ECD does not fit within one cluster, it is helpful to create a working group that includes multiple sectors with a link to the different cluster leads. In Colombia, the ECDiE Working Group is housed under the Education Cluster, which serves as the humanitarian response platform for children’s issues in the Venezuelan migration crisis, but it could be under any cluster where ECD should feature (such as Nutrition, Health, or Protection). Ideally this working group should be co-chaired with a UN actor (such as UNICEF or UNHCR) which will support efforts to then include policy and operational recommendations into relevant sections of Needs Assessment Overviews (NAOs) and HRPs where leadership for this work is via cluster lead agencies.



- Ensure government officials are part of the Working Group:** Inviting a government official into the working group, preferably as co-lead, helps support advocacy for inclusion in NAOs and HRPs and can also generate closer links between multilateral emergency programs and government development plans.
- Highlight ECD data gaps in past NAOs and other reference documents:** Reviewing past needs assessments, plans, studies, or data gathering exercises and pointing out where specific data and evidence on young children and their caregivers is missing helps create momentum for future inclusion in needs assessment processes and documents.
- Advocate to be part of Needs Assessment Technical Teams:** Most crisis contexts have technical teams pulling expertise from different clusters. ECDiE Coordinators and/or working group members should advocate to be a part of these teams and data collection and analysis exercises.
- Include ECD-related questions in needs assessments and questionnaires:** Finding ways to include questions such as “where are children ages 0-8 spending most of their time during the week?” into needs assessments will provide information not only about access to early education and care services, but also on who the children’s main caregivers are and their level of exposure to protection risks. Once questions are included into one needs assessment, advocate to include the same questions in other assessments. Also aim to broaden the breadth of data gathering, thus combining assessment data so that you can make a stronger case on key issues.
- Consider launching a data initiative with government actors:** In Colombia, the ECDiE WG initiated dialogue with the Ministry of Education to identify critical data on the status of access of children to all relevant government services. The overall goal is to have an infographic/dashboard in place by the end of 2022 that shows the status of young children in emergencies and the challenges they face. Access to this data will inform the government and multilateral organizations in-country and help them and their partners to provide more targeted interventions.
- Ensure ECD data is consolidated and not broken into different clusters/sectors:** One crucial action demonstrated in Colombia was the consolidation of ECD data in one place rather than having it scattered across several sectors. This ensured that analysis was robust, based on a whole child approach and the best available evidence.
- Talk up the humanitarian/development/peace nexus:** Argue that strengthened focus on ECDiE will help strengthen the nexus between humanitarian interventions, peace building and longer-term development: Children supported at ages 0-8 will have longer-lasting benefits not only for themselves, but also for the societies in which they live.

⁵ It should be noted that Colombia also has another large humanitarian coordination body called the Colombian Humanitarian Team (EHP) that focuses on humanitarian needs related to in-country conflict and natural disasters.

Colombia's ECD in Emergencies Working Group

In Colombia, Sesame Workshop and UNICEF co-lead the inter-sectoral ECD in Emergencies Working Group (ECDiE WG) which was created in February 2021 under the Education in Emergencies Cluster, which is part of the Interagency Group for Mixed Migration (or GIFMM in its Spanish acronym) lead by UNHCR and IOM. The cluster also coordinates the response and advocates on children's issues with the broader Colombian Humanitarian Team (EHP) lead by UNOCHA, which addresses the armed conflict, natural disasters, COVID-19 and other sanitary emergencies in the country.

The ECDiE Working Group engages the education, health, food security and nutrition, WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) sectors/clusters and child protection sub-sector/cluster. It also engages representatives from the Colombian government as an implementing partner (please see Annex 1 for coordination graphic and Annex 2 for a list of acronyms).

The learnings included in this document are based primarily on engagement of the Sesame Workshop funded ECD Coordinator and the ECD in Emergencies Working Group with the Interagency Group for Mixed Migration (GIFMM). This group focuses on:

- migrants/refugees that remain in Colombia (in-destination),
- those that cross the border between Venezuela and Colombia on a regular basis ("pendulares"),
- those that are heading toward other countries (in-transit), and
- Colombians who migrated to Venezuela a long time ago and are now returning due to the current crisis (returnees).
- Finally, and recently included into the GIFMM's focus, is transnational migration constituted of people from countries other than Venezuela (e.g. Angola, Haiti, Senegal, Cuba) whose intention is to cross the border with Panama and head towards the United States through Central America.

At the end of 2021, an estimated 1.84 million Venezuelan⁶ refugees and migrants in need of assistance were to be found in Colombia, of which approximately 230,000 are children between 0 and 7 years old⁷.

Needs Assessment Report and Response Process: Steps Taken and Accomplishments in Colombia

The evolution of including ECDiE in Colombia's Response Plans (RMRP) had several steps worth re-tracing:

In 2019 - a situation analysis focused on migrant children from Venezuela was conducted by Bases Sólidas and Sesame Workshop and found that while the GIFMM had gathered some information related to ECD, focused primarily on nutrition and health, **this data was insufficient to form any integrated ECD response strategy and was presented within sectoral silos**. The study also found that information on early childhood education (ECE) was not available because the previous RMRP response monitoring report from 2018 did not include indicators related to ECE interventions.

In 2020 - for the development of the RMRP 2021, **the Sesame ECDiE Coordinator advocated successfully to be included with the Needs Assessment Technical Team (NATT)**. The NATT noted that while there were some ECD-related questions in the needs assessment questionnaire for in-destination migrants, there was no question about access to ECE services. **Sesame advocated to include the following question** in the questionnaire: "Where are the children 0-5 years most of their time during the week?". Responses to this question provided information not only about access to ECE services, but also on who the children's main caregivers are and their level of exposure to protection related risks.

In 2021 - the ECDiE WG (created in February 2021), advocated to keep the same question in the in-destination migrants needs assessment questionnaire. The question was also included in the questionnaire for the pendular migrants needs assessment. When drafting the analysis, the **ECDiE WG advocated bringing together the analysis of ECD related questions into one section of the needs assessment report**. The consolidated questions integrated all early childhood-related questions on topics such as vaccination, sexual and reproductive health, maternal health, breastfeeding practices, nutritional status, food security and early education. This section, entitled "comprehensive ECD services" was able to inform, from a life cycle approach⁸, the needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women, and children ages 0-5.

From the evidence that was uncovered in **the gap analysis on ECD, attention was raised in preparing the Humanitarian Response and the-RMRP 2022 to include specific interventions and coordinated actions between sectors to ensure a**

6 <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/rmrp-2022-colombia>

7 Number of children with pre-registration in the Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelan Migrants.

8 life-cycle approach takes into account every stage of a life, from pre-conception to adulthood

holistic response to the needs of young children and their families, as well as pregnant and breastfeeding women. Although ECE needs were identified and the education sector in Colombia included priorities and activities for ECE in the HRP, the Regional RMRP 2022 included interventions on health and nutrition, but ECE was not included.

In 2022 - for the preparation of the RMRP 2023-2024, ECD questions will be included in the needs assessments questionnaire for in-transit and pendular migrants, as well as for the destination migrants and returnees need assessment. Considering the fact that the migrant population is also affected by armed conflict and other emergencies, the two humanitarian architecture structures started to work together more closely in 2022, including by using the same needs assessment questionnaire across the two assessment and planning processes (RMRP and HRP). The same questions that were used in previous migrant needs assessments were used on the questionnaire for the 2022 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA)⁹ implemented in regions affected by the armed conflict to highlight the needs of young children, pregnant and breastfeeding woman on this regions and inform the development of the HNO of the Colombian Humanitarian Team (EHP). The challenge remains to translate the findings into a consolidated ECDiE section in the HNO as was done for the GIFMM, then to use these findings to inform priority responses for ECD in the HRP 2023. Finally, the ECDiE Working Group initiated a dialogue with the Ministry of Education that coordinates the ECD Monitoring System to identify critical data that can be used to show the status of access of children to relevant government services. This data system potentially will provide insight into ECD services targeting young children in emergencies. The overall goal was to have an infographic/dashboard¹⁰ that shows the status of and challenges facing young children in emergencies and their caregivers, which will help inform the government but also the in-country multilateral organizations and help provide more targeted interventions.

Conclusion

Colombia and the Latin America region have an intricate set of humanitarian assistance coordination mechanisms. The work of the in-country ECDiE Coordinator has been important to:

- Qualify and quantify gaps,
- Push for inclusion of the right questions in needs assessments,
- Combine information under one ECD heading in the reports, and
- Coordinate with the other mechanisms dealing with an array of people in need in the country so that they adopt similar language and analysis, giving ECD more prominence in coordination, programming and funding structures.

Steps undertaken that helped the coordination process included:

- Identifying and engaging those people who manage coordination tools and services (such as strategic and operational planning, needs assessments and reporting), which was a crucial first step in generating and obtaining the data and information that will enhance the collective focus on ECDiE.
- Consolidating the data in one place rather than having it siloed between sectors and clusters.
- Using the life-cycle approach in needs assessments to drive a coordinated and integrated response into the HRP and the Regional and country RMRP, including health, nutrition, early education, protection and WASH interventions. Using the whole child/life cycle approach to data and information management and related programming approaches places the now urgently required spotlight on ECDiE and helps to drive appropriate responses and related programmatic interventions for children.

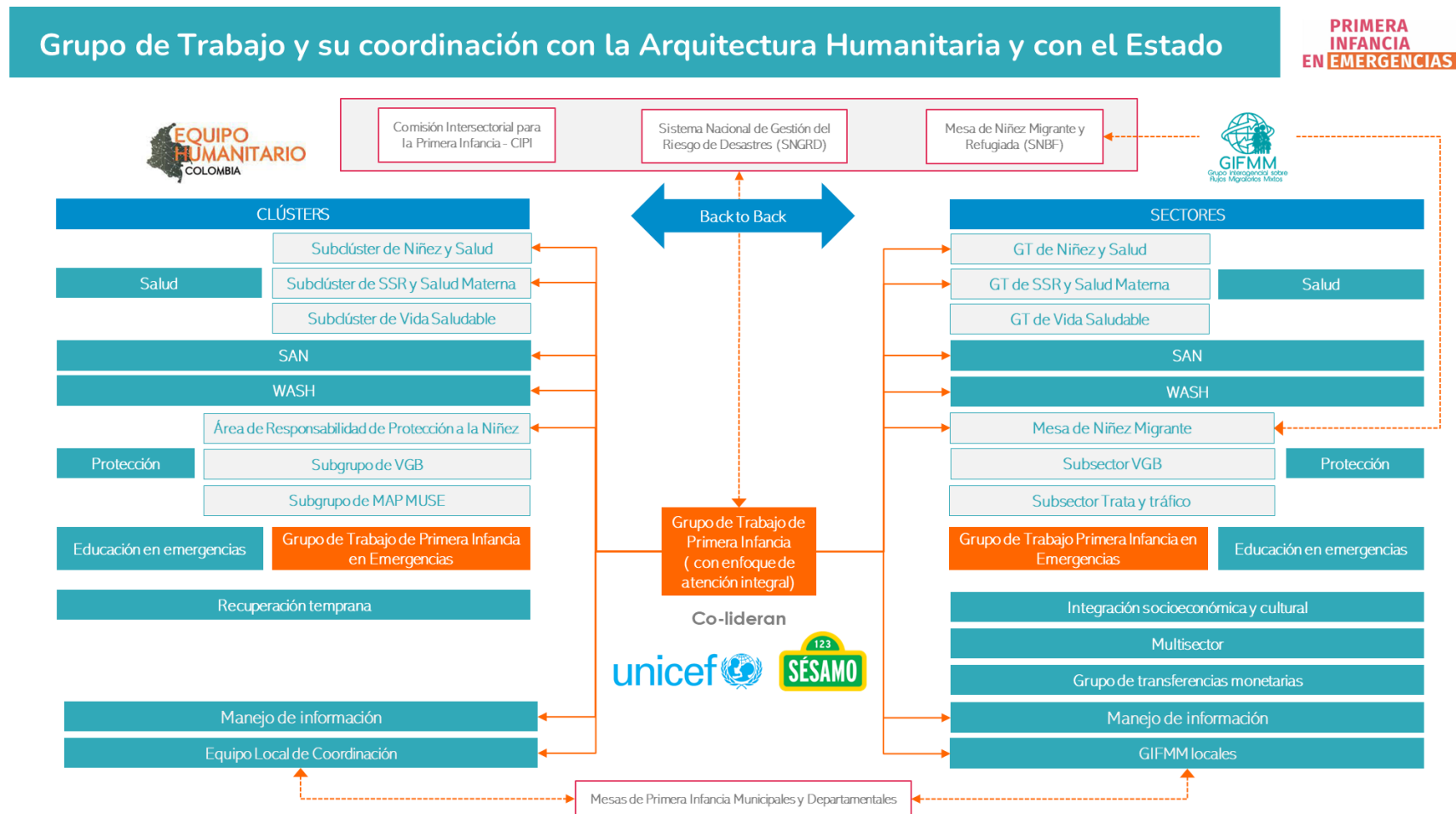
Challenges remain in having this approach accepted and integrated by both of the in-country multilateral coordination entities, as well as the regional coordination bodies where Colombia is but one of many other countries assisting Venezuelan refugees.

⁹ <https://www.reachresourcecentre.info/theme/multi-sector-assessments/>

¹⁰ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/colombia/infographic/colombia-dashbard-caracterizaci%C3%B3n-beneficiarios-primera-infancia-en>

Annex 1: Graphic of Coordination architecture in Colombia

The graphic below represents the humanitarian coordination structure in Colombia. On the right side, the Interagency Group for Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM in its Spanish acronym) is the coordination structure that implements the response for refugees and migrants from Venezuela. On the left side, the Colombian Humanitarian Team (EHP in its Spanish acronym) addresses other emergencies, including armed conflict, health emergencies (e.g., Covid-19) and natural disasters. In this context, the ECiE WG aims to articulate the Health, Food Security and Nutrition, WASH and Child Protection (child protection subgroup/subsector) clusters and sectors across both groups.



Annex 2: Glossary of Acronyms

EHP - Colombian Humanitarian Team focusing on other humanitarian needs outside of the Venezuelan refugee and migrant crisis. It includes population affected by conflict, natural disasters, COVID 19, amongst others.

GIFMM - Interagency Group for Mixed Migration Flows – the Colombian, national counterpart of the regional R4V

HNO - Humanitarian Needs Overview

HRP - Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is the presentation of a coordinated and strategic response conceived by humanitarian organizations to meet the acute needs of people affected by the emergency. It is based on the evidence of the needs described in the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and addresses them.

MSNA – Multi-sector Needs Analysis implemented by REACH

R4V - “Response for Venezuelans” – Interagency Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. A regional platform covering Latin America and the Caribbean with the aim to coordinate assistance provided to over 6 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants spread over 17 countries.

RMRP - Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan – includes all response plans of the 17 countries covered by the R4V