Message From the Executive Leadership Council

Dear Friends, Partners, and Colleagues,

On behalf of the Early Childhood Development Action Network’s (ECDAN’s) Executive Leadership Council (ELC), we extend our heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering support and collective action in championing the well-being of young children and their caregivers worldwide. We also thank the Secretariat team for their performance, quality work, and commitment. It is with great enthusiasm that we present to you our 2023 annual report, showcasing the remarkable achievements of our network and the collaborative endeavors undertaken by ECDAN partners and members.

The year 2023 marked a pivotal moment of reflection and progress as ECDAN embarked on a journey toward the next phase of its evolution. We built on growing momentum, tracked our results and lessons learned, and undertook an inclusive process to refresh our strategy for the next five years. Over a span of six months, we harnessed this opportunity to reenergize existing partners while attracting many more to join the movement. The culmination of this process and the resulting strategy stand as one of our defining achievements of the year.

The comprehensive early childhood development (ECD) landscape review, conducted in collaboration with Grand Challenges Canada, offered a sobering portrayal of the polycrisis affecting children and what is at stake for all of us. It has become increasingly evident that addressing the polycrisis demands a paradigm shift and calls for smarter, more innovative, and collaborative approaches. We are counting on you—our partners and members—to persist in your tireless commitment to improve the lives of young children and their families and shape a brighter future for generations to come.

With sincere appreciation,

ELC Co-chairs

Borhene Chakroun
Director, Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO

Lynette Okengo
Executive Director, Africa Early Childhood Network
Message From the Executive Director

Dear Friends, Partners, and Colleagues,

As I pen this letter, the tumult gripping our world weighs heavily on my heart. Children, innocent and vulnerable, find themselves displaced by the ravages of wars, conflicts, climate crisis, and other disasters. Increasing poverty, inequalities, and global hunger are putting children on the brink across the world.

Yet, amid this chaos and polycrisis, the network’s collaborative efforts offer a beacon of hope. Together, we remain steadfast in our commitment to championing the rights of young children, placing inclusion and equity at the forefront of our endeavors. For example, efforts to support parents and caregivers gained momentum with the launch of a global knowledge platform for the Global Initiative to Support Parents (GISP), which provided vital resources and support tools in multiple languages for families in crisis settings.

In this annual report, we highlight but a few of many notable collective achievements. As I reflect on the year, what stands out most to me includes the growth and strength of our movement and the increase in partners’ collaborative efforts. ECDAN partners continued to advocate on behalf of young children and families on the global stage, co-organizing events to integrate the early years into global agendas and spearheading calls to action to advocate for increased investment in the early years. A significant milestone was achieved in December when the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change recognized the disproportionate impact of climate change on children for the first time and called for an “expert dialogue.” This was a direct result of our partners’ tireless advocacy efforts, which leveraged other movements’ efforts. It has ignited hope for change as we jointly address the polycrisis.

Recognizing that data underpin our actions, ECDAN co-hosted a high-profile event in October with the Government of Rwanda and partners in the Harnessing Data For Young Children Coalition to take stock of the available ECD measurement tools and indicators, exchange experiences, promote harmonization of the tools, and ensure relevant data are captured and evidence is used to strengthen policies and services. Additionally, we pursued the application of systems thinking to effectively scale and sustain ECD programs and enhance our understanding of the childcare ecosystem. Collaborative efforts have allowed us to pinpoint critical levers for transformative change, promoting both child development and gender equity.

With more than 300 partners working across the world and growing engagement both offline and online, I am filled with hope and optimism for what our network can achieve together. Looking ahead, we are poised to translate our new five-year strategy into bold implementation plans and advocate fiercely for increased investments in the early years.

With gratitude,

Elizabeth Lule
Executive Director
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<td>AfECN</td>
<td>Africa Early Childhood Network</td>
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<td>ANECD</td>
<td>Arab Network for Early Childhood Development</td>
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<td>ARNEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood</td>
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<td>BRAC IED</td>
<td>BRAC Institute of Educational Development</td>
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<td>COP28</td>
<td>Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change</td>
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<td>ECCE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Care and Education</td>
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<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
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<td>ECDAN</td>
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<td>ELC</td>
<td>Executive Leadership Council</td>
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<td>G7</td>
<td>International group of seven (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, and the United States)</td>
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<td>G20</td>
<td>International group of 20 - intergovernmental forum comprising 19 countries and the European Union</td>
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<td>GISP</td>
<td>Global Initiative to Support Parents</td>
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<td>GPAAG</td>
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<td>Strategy Working Group</td>
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<td>TAG</td>
<td>Technical Advisory Group</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNGA</td>
<td>United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children's Fund</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
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<td>ZECDAN</td>
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ABOUT ECDAN
ECDAN was launched in 2016, by the leaders of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank Group, and 80 partners, to catalyze collective action and alignment for better ECD outcomes for young children from conception to age eight. We are a multisectoral, global network of multilateral agencies, international financial institutions, regional ECD networks, faith-based organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, universities, think tanks, practitioners, and advocates working together and independently to support ECD.

VISION
We envision a world where every young child is safe, healthy, well nourished, happy, and learning.

MISSION
Our mission is to advocate for prioritizing and investing in essential, high-quality ECD services; facilitate knowledge exchange and learning; and connect and align global and regional partners and networks across sectors to drive collective action at scale so that all young children can realize their full potential.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1. Advocate and communicate
Increase and sustain international and domestic political support for and investments in evidence-based ECD policies and programs to ensure that all young children thrive.

2. Learn and share
Increase access to and use of evidence-based knowledge to advance ECD policy and practice.

3. Coordinate, connect, and align
Improve alignment, coordination, and collaboration on common goals among ECD stakeholders and across sectors.

4. Strengthen the network
Expand and sustain an effective and efficient global network.
INTENDED IMPACT

We aim to accelerate the scale up of equitable and high-quality multisectoral ECD policies, programs, and services to ensure young children’s optimal brain development and productive potential. In doing so, ECDAN strives to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals related to child well-being. This includes ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition (Targets 2.1 and 2.2), ending preventable deaths of newborns and children under five (Target 3.2), ensuring all girls and boys have access to quality pre-primary education (Target 4.2), and ending all forms of violence against children (Target 16.2).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Be accountable
- Be collaborative and respectful
- Be inclusive, diverse, and equitable
- Be rights-based
- Be synergetic, relevant, innovative, and catalytic
- Be transparent
NETWORK ACHIEVEMENTS
ECDAN’S YEAR IN NUMBERS

- 7 joint events at global meetings
- 12 collaborative groups met regularly (involving 122 partner orgs)
- 17 webinars held with 7,309 registrations
- 41 partner resources added to the ECD Knowledge Gateway
- 11 blogs, 4 op-eds, and 5 calls to action co-authored
- 15,674 unique users visited ECDAN’s website
- 7 Knowledge Fellows selected from 75 applicants
- 20,067 combined subscribers & followers across platforms (42% increase)
- 308 organizational partners
- 1 partner engagement survey conducted with 189 responses
- 13 funders and 7 new awards (35% increase in funds raised)
- 1 new strategy finalized with input from 34 group meetings and individual interviews plus 2 membership surveys
- 7 Knowledge Fellows selected from 75 applicants
Throughout 2023, ECDAN continued to advocate for prioritizing the needs of young children and their caregivers by elevating key policy priorities such as childcare, parenting support, climate change, adopting a systems-thinking approach to ECD, and increasing financing for the early years. We leveraged major convenings and global events to build bridges across sectors and engage decision-makers.

**Highlights include the following:**

- **ECDAN participated in seven high-level global events** to raise awareness, engage partners, and mobilize action to influence policy and build political will to advance priority issues. This included the Comparative and International Education Society Conference, the Government of Japan’s high-level dialogue on ending violence against children, the Clinton Foundation’s meeting on the intersection of climate change and early childhood, the Women Deliver Conference, the G20 summit in India, UNGA, and COP28. We co-hosted seven side events at three of these gatherings for deeper engagement.

- To mobilize action on pressing challenges facing children and families, **we collaborated with partners to draft and circulate five calls to action.** These calls were in response to the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, the violence in Israel and Gaza, the opportunity to prioritize young children in climate change discussions, the need to elevate support for caregivers in humanitarian crises, and the chance to prioritize ECD as the G20 presidency transitions to Brazil.

- The Global Policy and Advocacy Advisory Group (GPAAG) held multiple consultations to identify partners working at the intersection of ECD and climate change and share strategies to elevate the needs of young children and their caregivers within the climate discourse. A core group of partners emerged from these consultations, and they coordinated action leading up to and during COP28. Children were given more visibility than ever with the first thematic day for children and several side events. As a result of these and other advocacy efforts, **COP28 ended with a commitment to hold “an expert dialogue on the disproportionate impact of climate change on children and relevant policy solutions.”** This was a significant breakthrough and will guide ECDAN’s advocacy actions in 2024.

- The Global Childcare Campaign ramped up its efforts to build relationships and advocate collectively with gender equality and labor...
movements. This led to ECDAN’s participation in drafting a global roadmap for action on care and the invitation to join the WeProser coalition Secretariat. Campaign advocacy tools were made available on a website that was launched on March 8, International Women’s Day.

- We broadened our outreach to new audiences across the world through editorial and digital storytelling. Four op-eds were published in global media outlets. We highlighted key messages about parenting support for parenting month in June and about childcare and the care economy for the first International Day of Care and Support on October 29.
Dr. Erum Mariam is the Executive Director of BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED) and BRAC University in Dhaka, Bangladesh. BRAC IED provides technical expertise and support for BRAC’s work in ECD, education, and mental health in countries across Asia and Africa, such as Bangladesh, Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, and the Philippines. It pioneers innovative approaches and offers technical expertise in areas like content development, capacity building, research, and advocacy in both humanitarian and non-humanitarian contexts.

In 2023, Erum’s connection to ECDAN deepened as BRAC IED became a leading member of the childcare systems working group. “ECDAN fosters a dynamic platform for learning, sharing knowledge, and exchanging ideas,” Erum said. “ECDAN’s global platform facilitates advocacy efforts that support the needs of countries while contributing to the global movement for childcare.”

The childcare systems working group developed a comprehensive systems map for childcare that sheds light on the intricate factors influencing global childcare systems. To test out and further refine this model with stakeholders, BRAC IED and ECDAN teamed up to facilitate a workshop titled “Systems Thinking in Early Childhood Development in Emergencies” in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, in July 2023. Keynote speakers and local practitioners discussed strategies for overcoming barriers and leveraging opportunities for positive change.

Erum looks forward to continuing to build on this work in 2024 with additional workshops and learning events. BRAC IED is committing its resources to host the childcare systems partners in February 2024. “Our collaboration stemmed from mutual dedication to sharing knowledge and advocating on a global scale,” she said. “Being part of ECDAN’s initiatives strengthens our broader partnerships and amplifies BRAC IED’s impact.”
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2
LEARN AND SHARE

In feedback surveys, ECDAN partners consistently reported receiving great benefits from our cross-country learning opportunities and knowledge exchange activities. In 2023, we built on successful models for knowledge dissemination and facilitated discussions by coordinating working groups, hosting webinars and events, publishing newsletters and partner stories, and adding to the ECD Knowledge Gateway. In addition to sharing the latest reports authored by our partners, we co-created blog posts, case studies, toolkits, fact sheets, and other resources to maximize learning and collaboration.

Highlights include the following:

• Together with our partners, we hosted 17 webinars with 7,309 registrations. These webinars covered a wide range of topics, including applying systems thinking to ECD, using the Early Childhood Education Accelerator Toolkit, scaling up playful parenting practices, reflecting on the uptake of the Nurturing Care Framework, and providing childcare in urban settings, among others.

• ECDAN partners co-created 11 blog posts, highlighting their work and reflecting on advocacy opportunities. We shared 41 resources (i.e., reports, toolkits, guides, policy briefs) on the ECD Knowledge Gateway and many more across social media. To increase visibility and ease of access to information, we developed three campaign microsites for different collaborative initiatives—Childcare for All, GISP, and NurtureFirst (promoting home-based childcare)—to amplify these issues and reach new audiences.

• In collaboration with governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and cross-sectoral stakeholders, we facilitated two in-person workshops to share knowledge and best practices. In July, we partnered with BRAC IED and the Bangladesh Humanitarian ECD Working Group to hold a workshop in Cox’s Bazar on ECD in emergencies that discussed systems thinking as a tool to strengthen humanitarian interventions. In October, we co-convened partners in Rwanda to discuss harmonized measurement of ECD outcomes at the country level.

• ECDAN convened a childcare systems working group with experts from seven leading childcare organizations across Asia and Africa. The group met on a biweekly basis to share and reflect on their contextual realities and develop a shared understanding of the childcare system. It also developed strategies to advance systems approaches in childcare and build bridges across sectors to improve the provision of and access to high-quality childcare services.

© WHO / Gato Borrero
ECDAN's flagship Knowledge Fellows program aims to build the next generation of ECD leaders and elevate fresh perspectives and voices. In 2023, we recruited a third cohort of early-career ECD professionals after supporting the second cohort of Fellows to graduate in April. Seven Fellows were selected from 75 applicants in 28 countries. We matched each Fellow with a seasoned ECD professional to provide them with mentoring, networking, and professional development after they co-created a project plan with the Secretariat. The Fellows in the third cohort are working to complete their knowledge projects, which will be ready for dissemination after the first half of 2024. Their projects are as follows:

- A policy brief with recommendations for how the right to free early childhood education can be realized in Vietnam.
- A repository of systems thinking approaches, methodologies, and tools that may be used to achieve ECD outcomes at scale.
- A review of existing parenting programs in Africa to assess responsiveness to adolescent parents’ needs.
- A resource brief that reviews frameworks for providing universal childcare for children under three.
- A curated review of scaled and transition-to-scale early childhood parenting programs with recommendations for implementers.
- A report of lessons learned from reflective practitioners that explores the obstacles and opportunities for parenting support in humanitarian crisis settings, using the case study of the Rohingya crisis in Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh.
- A resource brief with comparative examples of global parenting initiatives with unique components from different contexts.

**THIRD COHORT**

DUONG VU
(Vietnam)

MUBARIK ABDUL-RAHMAN
(Ghana)

NOELLIE AMON-KOTEY
(Ghana)

PAUL OTWATE
(Kenya)

RAHUL PETHE
(India)

SM RASHEDUJJAMAN
(Bangladesh)

TANVI SETHI
(India)

To see a list of mentors and members of the Knowledge Fellows program Steering Committee, see page 35.
Growing up in Brazil and being the first in her family to access higher education, Jaqueline Natal observed and experienced social inequality all around her. Jaqueline studied economics and went on to obtain a master’s degree from the University of São Paulo. She developed a passion for conducting applied economics research to understand and unlock social issues, such as early childhood education.

Jaqueline first connected with ECDAN through its Cost of Inaction advocacy tool. She piloted the Cost of Inaction tool in the context of Brazil and co-authored a report with the results. When she learned about the Knowledge Fellows program, it seemed like the perfect opportunity for her to benefit from connections to other ECD professionals across the globe. She was accepted into the program and joined five other Knowledge Fellows to make up the 2022 cohort.

Jaqueline completed a study on the effective expenditure per child in early childhood education by Brazilian municipalities as her fellowship project. During the fellowship, Jacqueline co-founded a WhatsApp group promoting ECD in Brazil. Today the group has more than 240 people from different sectors, and it will soon have its first in-person meeting to discuss innovative solutions to complex issues in the Brazilian early childhood agenda. She has also continued to collaborate with ECDAN to increase the use of the Cost of Inaction tool.

“The encouragement I am still receiving from ECDAN partners and the Secretariat has made a considerable difference in my professional life,” Jaqueline said. “I not only found a safe place to grow but also found the right people to connect with—people who have the same mission as me. We believe that every child should have the opportunity to reach their full potential.”
ECDAN’s success lies in its capacity to convene partners around common goals and showcase the power of collaboration and innovation. In 2023, we worked to expand the reach and impact of 12 unique collaborative groups, including communities of practice and working groups, as well as coordinated with regional ECD networks to respond to pressing issues. In October, ECDAN met in person in South Africa with the regional networks to discuss ways to measure network effectiveness by adapting the network health scorecard. We also collaborated with the regional networks in Africa and Asia-Pacific on a funding proposal on climate change and to establish a global climate working group. Summary achievements from each regional ECD network and several collaborative initiatives are showcased below.

REGIONAL ECD NETWORKS’ IMPACT

Africa Early Childhood Network

The Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN) leveraged its expertise and connections to help strengthen EDC networks across the region. It collaborated with key stakeholders to establish the National Early Childhood Development Network—The Gambia, which was officially launched on December 5. Attended by 50 participants from diverse stakeholder groups, the event marked a significant milestone for ECD in the country. AfECN also supported the Zambia Early Childhood Development Action Network (ZECDAN) in its journey toward forming a national ECD network, which now boasts 60 members and an elected board. Continuing its support, AfECN is assisting ZECDAN in enhancing its institutional capacity.

Additionally, from March 28 to 30, AfECN partnered with the Government of Zambia and the Southern Africa Network for Early Childhood Development to host the Southern Africa Regional Conference on Early Childhood Development in Lusaka. This conference brought together over 250 delegates, including policymakers, researchers, civil service organizations, and ECD practitioners, to advance the cause of quality and inclusive ECD and education in southern Africa.
Arab Network for Early Childhood Development

The Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD) has demonstrated multifaceted and impactful efforts to address the unique needs of young children in the region. In 2023, ANECD expanded its reach by establishing and supporting four additional early childhood groups and networks in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia, while continuing to develop existing networks in Jordan and Palestine. Regional events, including the inaugural forum titled “Caring for Young Children in a Turbulent World: Development Strategies in Arab Countries,” facilitated knowledge dissemination and collaboration among 60 members and representatives from 13 Arab countries.

ANECD prioritized resource mobilization to support children, parents, and caregivers, developing an online psychological support package with ways of engaging men and fathers in ECD, and launching the Urjouha Library—a digital storytelling hub. Since its launch, the library has engaged over 11,500 individuals in reading books or listening to songs with their young children. Additionally, ANECD launched an advocacy campaign to support children and families affected by wars and conflicts in Palestine, Gaza, and the West Bank. Throughout the year, ANECD disseminated research on critical topics such as climate change and young children, the ECD workforce, mental health, and children’s rights, aiming to elevate evidence and best practices in the region.

Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood

The Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) has been actively addressing issues concerning the early childhood workforce in the region in alignment with the global Early Childhood Workforce Initiative. Recognizing the significance of social and emotional learning (SEL) in holistic child development, ARNEC partnered with the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Culture Organization (UNESCO) Regional Office in Bangkok and the Association for Early Childhood Educators Singapore to conduct a four-day regional training for trainers in Singapore in November 2023. The event brought together national ECD networks and partners in the region, such as BRAC IED in Bangladesh, the Early Childhood Education Department of Cambodia, HCLFoundation in India, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Council of Malaysia, the Early Childhood Care and Development Council in the Philippines, Philippine Normal University, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) from the Philippines, the Early Childhood Development Agency in Singapore, and the Ministry of Education in Vanuatu, to develop capacities in using the Asia-Pacific ECCE Teacher Training Handbook for Social and Emotional Learning. The ongoing collaboration between ARNEC, UNESCO, and the Association for Early Childhood Educators Singapore will focus on embedding SEL in teacher training courses to further promote inclusive and quality ECCE provisions.
Leveraging its expertise in ECD in Europe and Central Asia, the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) plays a vital role in connecting and empowering key stakeholders in the early childhood ecosystem. In 2023, ISSA demonstrated its effectiveness through two notable initiatives—the Ukraine response and the First Years First Priority campaign.

In response to the war in Ukraine, ISSA swiftly mobilized resources and expertise to support displaced families and communities. This included enhancing the psychosocial support skills of early childhood practitioners, empowering municipalities to develop inclusive ECD strategies, promoting equity through diversity training, facilitating cross-border learning, and providing tools for long-term reconstruction efforts.

Additionally, ISSA collaborated with Eurochild, the European Public Health Alliance, and the Roma Education Fund to lead the First Years First Priority campaign. This advocacy effort aimed to prioritize ECD in public policies and budget allocations across Europe, ensuring every child from birth to age six receives essential support. Through collaborative approaches and leveraging thematic expertise, the campaign documented the challenges facing refugees and migrant children, young children with disabilities, and young Roma children, and influenced policy decisions, including a new European Parliament resolution.
Global Initiative to Support Parents

PARTNERS

International Rescue Committee

Parenting for Lifelong Health at the University of Oxford

UNICEF

WHO

FOCUS

To provide a platform for governments, civil society partners, researchers, and donors to promote parenting and caregiver support so that every child can receive the support they need during the first two decades of life and across the life course.

2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Throughout 2023, GISP strengthened its reach and technical support to partners around the world implementing parenting programs. During parenting month in June, GISP launched its global knowledge platform and disseminated messages across social media and other channels to amplify the importance of universal access to parent and caregiver support. GISP partners hosted the first annual Global Parenting Townhall to allow countries to share their work, priorities, challenges, and parenting success stories. Each quarter, GISP distributed a newsletter with resources and updates from partners and other stakeholders.

In early 2023, GISP released reports of lessons learned from the four regional convenings held in 2022. The Regional Convening in Support of Parents and Caregivers in the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, and North Africa Regions was held in August. The event was co-organized with ANECD alongside the regional WHO and UNICEF offices. It brought stakeholders together to advocate for the social, mental, and physical well-being of parents and caregivers and examined the implementation of evidence-based policies and interventions in the region.

Through the Parenting in Crisis initiative, GISP gathered and disseminated resources in multiple languages to support parents and caregivers experiencing crises in Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, and Türkiye. Two case studies were published reflecting on the use and impact of GISP resources distributed in 2022, following the floods in Pakistan and the conflict in Ukraine. In December, GISP launched a joint pledge in support of parents and caregivers with the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action at the Global Refugee Forum, to advocate for prioritizing support for refugee parents and caregivers.
Harnessing Global Data for Young Children

**PARTNERS**

University of Oxford  
University of Witwatersrand  
Brigham and Women’s Hospital  
Harvard University  
Inter-American Development Bank  
Regional ECD networks  
UNICEF  
University of Hong Kong  
University of Nebraska  
University of Pennsylvania  
WHO  
World Bank Group

**FOCUS**

To leverage data on children in low- and middle-income countries to improve child development, early learning, and preprimary education through better understanding of determinants of and risks to children’s development, the economic consequences of inaction, and policy and legal frameworks to address challenges.

**2023 HIGHLIGHTS**

The Harnessing Global Data for Young Children coalition held a groundbreaking conference in Rwanda in October with country ministers, ECD actors, and NGOs to discuss how to measure ECD outcomes at the country level for eastern and southern Africa. It brought together policymakers across the sectors of education, health, and social protection, along with researchers, UN agencies, and data scientists, to discuss the development and implementation of ECD measurement and data systems.

ECDAN co-hosted the event with the Government of Rwanda, UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank, and AfECN. The meeting emphasized the importance of including ECD indicators in demographic surveys and worked to harmonize the measurement tools produced by each of the multilaterals.

*Representatives from government agencies, ministries, academia, nongovernmental groups, and other stakeholders at the meeting on ECD measurement. Photo credit: ECDAN Staff.*
NurtureFirst

PARTNERS

Echidna Giving
ELMA Foundation
Global Development Incubator
Imaginable Futures
Jubilee Foundation
Spring Impact
UBS Optimus Foundation

FOCUS

To build responsive, coherent, and financially sustainable systems that support home-based childcare providers to deliver high-quality childcare.

2023 HIGHLIGHTS

The home-based childcare (HBCC) donor collaborative deepened its work in Kenya by completing systems mapping in three counties. The local team conducted site visits, held interviews, and facilitated focus group discussions with parents and HBCC providers to understand the current context and key challenges. Based on these learnings, eight pilot projects were developed to test different systems change levers. The pilot projects are being implemented by county governments together with an identified community-based organization.

Throughout 2023, the Steering Committee of the HBCC Collaborative Initiative worked to develop its own name and brand identity. In early December, NurtureFirst was launched and introduced to a global audience with its website during a webinar. NurtureFirst also held in-person launch events in Kenya and shared the progress of the eight pilot projects with national stakeholders.

NurtureFirst Director brings caregivers to meet policy makers to celebrate the International Day of Care in Kenya. Credit: ECDAN Staff.
Nurturing Care Framework
Core Group

PARTNERS

UNICEF
World Health Organization

World Bank
Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

FOCUS

To collaborate on advocacy activities that will increase the uptake of the Nurturing Care Framework, as well as capture and share lessons learned from its application.

2023 HIGHLIGHTS

To mark the five-year milestone since its launch in 2018, the Nurturing Care Framework core group published a progress report and held events to share lessons learned and reenergize stakeholders to use the Nurturing Care Framework and its implementation guide. Annotated with stories of change, the report provides a snapshot of progress in relation to each of the five strategic actions of the framework and shows the breadth of activities that have been undertaken. The report was released in June, followed by a virtual event that summarized the key takeaways.
To explore the potential application of systems thinking in accelerating progress in equitable and sustainable promotion and implementation of ECD programs at scale.

In 2023, the Systems Thinking for Early Childhood Development initiative co-authored a commentary that was published in *BMJ Global Health (May 2023)*, a peer-reviewed medical trade journal. The commentary explored the lessons learned from other disciplines where systemic approaches have been embedded in service delivery, enabling implementation at scale.

In July, ECDAN and BRAC IED, supported by ReImagined Futures, convened members of the Bangladesh Early Childhood Development in Emergencies working group in Cox’s Bazar to discuss systems thinking as a tool for strengthening humanitarian systems and improving support for young children and their families. Participants were introduced to the Moving Minds Alliance’s *Humanitarian Systems Map* and explored its applications in their local context. This experience was documented in a case study on humanitarian ECD systems in Bangladesh.

The childcare systems working group, with representatives from seven leading childcare organizations in Asia and Africa, met biweekly to develop a shared understanding of the childcare system and explore avenues to improve the provision of and access to high-quality childcare. The group undertook the development of a childcare systems map and a thought piece to advance the application of systems approaches to childcare.

Recognizing the key role of systems investments, ECDAN hosted a dialogue with a group of donors in Venice, Italy, and conducted in-depth consultations with ten donors to understand and advance systems investing in ECD.
ECDAN’s governing bodies spent the last six months of the year deeply engaged in a process to refresh ECDAN’s strategy and set ambitions for the coming five years. In developing our strategy, we used a consultative, participatory, and inclusive process to solicit feedback and insights from specific stakeholder groups as well as the entire network of partners. ECDAN experienced another strong fundraising year in 2023. Expenditures totaled USD$2,611,010, reflecting a 35 percent increase from 2022. We received first-time grants from two funders and renewed grants from five funders, making a total of seven new awards.

** Highlights include the following:**

- **In June, the ELC met in person in Paris to kick off the strategic planning process.** Mark Tomlinson, co-chair of ECDAN’s Technical Advisory Group (TAG), presented findings on the state of young children from his landscape scan. The report, funded by Grand Challenges Canada, provided the basis for our new strategy.

- **The strategy development process took six months and involved regular consultations with the ELC, TAG, and the newly formed Strategy Working Group (SWG).** Individual interviews, special consultations, and member surveys were also critical parts of the process. The result was a strategy with a better-defined mission and a sharper focus on the most vulnerable.

- **Early in the year, the Secretariat welcomed three new staff members** and enhanced its operational systems.

- **In May, we updated our new partner application form and developed welcome packet materials for accepted partners. We were excited to welcome 30 new official partners in 2023.** We also strengthened our partnership database by categorizing partners based on their level of involvement in network activities.

- **We sent our first partner engagement survey to ECDAN members in January and received 189 responses.** Feedback was analyzed and used for annual and strategic planning. Results confirmed the value of our knowledge sharing activities but challenged us to expand engagement to smaller partners and increase support to country-level advocates. [View the summary infographic.](#)

- **78 PERCENT of respondents said interacting with ECDAN had increased their knowledge or awareness on ECD topics.**
Dr. Donald Wertlieb is an applied developmental scientist specializing in pediatric psychology and professor emeritus at Tufts University. Don’s involvement with ECDAN dates back to its inception, and he reestablished a deeper connection with ECDAN in 2023 when the Early Child Development Task Force (ECDtf) asked him to participate in the strategy refresh process. “Our engagement with ECDAN has been truly valuable, benefiting us as a network member and advancing our shared commitment to catalyzing collective action for young children with disabilities and their families,” explained Don.

Don wanted to use this opportunity to not only ensure greater commitment to reaching all young children with inclusive ECD and nurturing care services but also as a mentoring opportunity, passing the baton to an early-career disability rights advocate. Evelyne Huizinga, an intern with the Partnership for Early Childhood Development and Disability Rights, joined Don in regular meetings of ECDAN’s SWG and provided suggestions for how to highlight the needs of children with disabilities and developmental delays in the strategy.

“I have grown immeasurably from being part of ECDAN’s SWG,” Evelyne said. “First, the inclusive and participatory dynamics of the group were conducive to effective collaboration and gave me a model I would like to try to replicate in the future. Second, it gave me the opportunity to apply what I learned in my coursework to the work being done. Third, I connected my understanding of inclusive ECD services at the local level to the global level.”

Evelyne co-founded an organization that provides community-based rehabilitation services to people in rural areas of Malawi. She believes that her experience contributing to ECDAN’s strategy development will help her address the needs of children with disabilities more effectively at the community level.

“ECDAN’s new strategy is a great contribution to global efforts aimed at increasing the attention given to including children with disabilities in ECD services, which is particularly relevant given that the number of children living with disabilities is increasing.”

- EVELYNE HUIZINGA
## FINANCIAL SUMMARY

### Actual Expenditure, By Category (USD)
January 1-December 31, 2023

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERSONNEL</td>
<td>$995,161</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRINGE BENEFITS</td>
<td>$290,394</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONSULTANTS</td>
<td>$247,795</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAVEL</td>
<td>$95,789</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBAGREEMENTS</td>
<td>$271,800</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKSHOPS &amp; TRAINING</td>
<td>$4,107</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER PROJECT COSTS</td>
<td>$307,295</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIRECT COSTS</td>
<td>$398,668</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,611,010</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Funders

Our work would not be possible without the generous support of the following organizations, which provided sustaining financial support. They enabled us to maintain and expand our core functions and efforts to realize collective impact for young children. In 2023, we utilized grant funding from the 13 entities below:

- Bainum Family Foundation
- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- Echidna Giving
- Imaginable Futures
- LEGO Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Porticus
- UNICEF
- University of Oxford
- UBS Optimus Foundation
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- World Health Organization

ECDAN also benefited from significant in-kind contributions, as partners voluntarily committed their resources, time, and expertise to support ECDAN's goals.
In the coming year, to continue building a movement for young children, we will devote considerable time to forming a global financing working group and collaboratively developing and implementing a strategy for an ECD financing campaign. We will also focus on coordinating with humanitarian networks (Moving Minds Alliance, Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, Education Cannot Wait, etc.) to respond to crises and adapt resources for young children and their families in crisis settings.

To enhance knowledge sharing and learning for practitioners and advocates globally, we are excited to launch a Masterclass Series in Systems Thinking for ECD with global experts, which will generate lessons learned for future virtual learning opportunities. We will recruit a new cohort of six Knowledge Fellows, who will focus on the intersection of climate change and ECD. Additionally, we will improve access to resources and supportive community by relaunching ECDAN’s online community, ECD Connect, to enhance user experience and increase engagement. We will also update ECDAN’s website to align with our new strategy and collaborate with partners to update the thematic resources on the ECD Knowledge Gateway.

To enhance our collective advocacy efforts, we will invest in responding to requests for resources and skill-building to strengthen the capacity for local advocates to effectively build bridges and forge alliances with other movements for childcare. Additionally, we will develop and implement a strategy for recruiting, supporting, and activating ECD champions at the country level to ensure policy priorities gain traction on the global stage.

We invite you and your organization to engage with network members to drive collective action to advance young children’s outcomes! Together, we can make a difference.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Executive Leadership Council

ECDAN is governed by the ELC. This body was established at the start of 2020, when ECDAN launched its first strategic plan. The role of the ELC is to oversee management, support fundraising, manage risks, and guide strategy. Nine seats on the ELC are reserved for specific partner agencies and other NGOs, and individual members can be elected. ELC members volunteer their time and make considerable in-kind contributions with their resources and expertise, to enable the success of ECDAN. We are deeply grateful to the following ELC members and the institutions they represent.

Amina Abubakar, Aga Khan University*
Anshu Banerjee, WHO
Borhene Chakroun, UNESCO (Co-chair)*
Eduardo Queiroz, Head of Bracell Foundation*
Gabriel Demombynes, World Bank Group
George Kronnisanyon Werner, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Center
Ghassan Issa, ANECD*
Joan Lombardi, Early Opportunities*
Liana Ghent, ISSA*
Lynette Okengo, AfECN (Co-chair)*
Marcy Vigoda, Scaling Up Nutrition Movement
Mark Tomlinson, Stellenbosch University*

Muhammad Musa, Care International
Nikolaj Gilbert, PATH
Omar Abdi, UNICEF*
Peter Laugharn, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
Rukmini Banerji, Pratham Education Foundation
Her Royal Highness Princess Sarah Zeid of Jordan, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Patron for Maternal and Newborn Health
Sheldon Shaeffer, ARNEC
Sherrie Westin, Sesame Workshop
Sneha Sheth, Dost Education
Youssef Hajjar, Arab Resource Collective and ANECD

* Member of the Steering Committee
**Technical Advisory Group**

ECDAN’s TAG works closely with the Secretariat to identify ECDAN’s technical priorities, provide expert technical advice and direction, and make recommendations to the ELC to inform their strategic decisions. TAG members have been specially selected to ensure cross-sectoral, cross-disciplinary, and cross-regional representation.

*Aisha Yousafzai*, Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health

*Amina Abubakar*, Aga Khan University

*Bernadette Daelmans*, WHO

*Boniface Kakhobwe*, UNICEF

*Claudia Cappa*, UNICEF

*George Evans Owino*, AfECN

*James Radner*, Harvard University Center on the Developing Child

*Javier Curcio*, Instituto Interdisciplinario de Economía Política

*Jill Popp*, LEGO Foundation

*Katie Murphy*, International Rescue Committee

*Lara Aoude*, Arab Resource Collective and Arab Network for ECD

*Lisa Bohmer*, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

*Mahmuda Akhter*, Institute of Child and Human Development

*Mark Tomlinson*, Stellenbosch University, (Chair)

*Maureen Samms-Vaughan*, University of the West Indies

*Rachel Maranto*, Plan International

*Melissa Kelly*, World Bank Group

*Muideen Bakare*, Childhood Neuropsychiatric Disorders Initiatives

*Nathaniel Foote*, Harvard University Center on the Developing Child

*Rachael Glaser*, International Development Consultant

*Robert Hughes*, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

*Romilla Karnati*, Save the Children

*Sanjana Janardhanan*, Grand Challenges Canada

*Sonia Giese*, DataDrive2030

*Vidya Putcha*, Results for Development

*Wanjiku Kuria*, World Vision Kenya

*Zorica Trikic*, ISSA
Global Policy and Advocacy Advisory Group

The GPAAG was formed in 2021 to provide strategic support, advice, and thought leadership on ECDAN's advocacy work, including the Childcare for All campaign. GPAAG meets quarterly and helps to identify and coordinate efforts to leverage influencing opportunities and build dynamic alliances.

Alex Dye, Kidogo
Amanda Devercelli, World Bank Group
Amina Abubakar, Aga Khan University
Anita Gurgel, World Bank Group
Ankita Panda, The Asia Foundation
Bernadette Daelmans, WHO
Boniface Kakhobwe, UNICEF
Chemba Raghavan, UNICEF
Dana Schmidt, Echidna Giving
Daniel Irvine, World Vision
Debjeet Sen, PATH
Elana Banin, International Rescue Committee
Emilienne de Leon, Global Alliance for Care
Erinna Dia, UNICEF
Evelyn Santiago, ARNEC
Fiana Arba, Oxfam
Frances Mary Beaton-Day, World Bank Group
Ghassan Issa, ANECD
Ginette Azcona, UN Women
Grace Boutros, ANECD
Grace Matlhape, SmartStart
Hopolang Selebalo, SmartStart

Jamie Gow, USAID
Jennifer Hansel, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Jennifer Katherine Albone, World Bank Group
Joan Lombardi, Early Opportunities (Chair)
Katy Anis, Independent Technical Advisor
Kehinde Ajayi, Center for Global Development
Kelsey Harris, Center for Global Development
Laura Addati, International Labour Organization
Laura Alfers, WIEGO
Lauren Gula, International Finance Corporation
Liana Ghent, ISSA
Lynette Okengo, AfECN
Mamadou Bobo Diallo, UN Women
Maria Mdach, AfECN
Mark Tomlinson, Stellenbosch University
Mary Borrowman, Center for Global Development
Megan O’Donnell, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Melissa Diane Kelly, World Bank Group
Childcare Systems Working Group

The Childcare Systems Working Group was formed in 2023 to exchange experiences and co-create solutions for scaling access to high-quality, affordable childcare using systems approaches. It includes representatives from seven leading childcare organizations in Asia and Africa.

Erum Mariam, BRAC IED
Ferdousi Khanom, BRAC IED
Gerard Oliver D’Costa, BRAC IED
Chittaranjan Kaul, Foundation for Communities of Learning
Monika Banerjee, Mobile Creches
Sumitra Mishra, Mobile Creches
Lucy Minayo, NurtureFirst
Sarah Klaus, OneSky

Vo Thi Hien, OneSky
Grace Matlhape, SmartStart
Rebecca Hickman, SmartStart
Richard Chivaka, Spark Health Africa
Elizabeth Lule, ECDAN
Shekufeh Zonji, ECDAN
Shreya Prakash, ECDAN
Knowledge Fellows Program Contributors

The Knowledge Fellows program is guided by a Steering Committee that works to shortlist Knowledge Fellows applicants and ensure high quality for the entire program. Mentors are carefully selected and matched with a Fellow to guide him or her in carrying out a specific knowledge project and support the Fellow’s professional development. All mentors and Steering Committee members volunteer their time and generously offer their expertise to empower early-career ECD professionals.

KNOWLEDGE FELLOWS STEERING COMMITTEE

Aisha K. Yousafzai, Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Beatrice Matafwali, University of Zambia
Elizabeth Lule, ECDAN
Frances E. Aboud, McGill University (Chair)
Joy Millan Maler, UNICEF Pacific
Kerrie Proulx, Mount Sinai Health System

Kim Foulds, Sesame Workshop
Kimberly Boller, American Psychological Association
Lucy Basset, University of Virginia
Nirmala Rao, University of Hong Kong
Steve Lye, University of Toronto

KNOWLEDGE FELLOW MENTORS

THIRD COHORT

Frances E. Aboud, McGill University
Hoa Nghiem, Human Rights Space
Margaret Hargreaves, NORC
Sabine Rakotomalala, WHO

Tamsen Rochat, Manchester Metropolitan University
Tina Hyder, University of Sussex
Vidur Chopra, UNICEF Europe and Central Asia
Secretariat

ECDAN’s Secretariat comprises dedicated professionals who carry out the strategic vision, make programmatic decisions, and manage the funds raised. It is the day-to-day contributions of these team members that bring ECDAN’s mission to life.

FULL-TIME STAFF

Amanda Germanio, GISP Coordinator
Brett Weisel, Global Policy & Advocacy Lead
Caroline Mochoge, Communications Associate
Elizabeth Lule, Executive Director
Emily Gilkinson, Senior Program Officer
Hannah Frohm, Senior Program Assistant
Katherine Shek, Senior Communications Officer
Lucy Minayo, NurtureFirst Executive Director
Shekufeh Zonji, Global Technical Lead

PATH STAFF WHO SERVE PART-TIME TO SUPPORT ECDAN

Carrie Hubbell Melgarejo, Partnership Engagement Manager (former)
Sarah Marjane, Director of Finance and Administration
Sheila Maina, Program Assistant

CONSULTANTS AND CONTRACTORS

Aisha Yousafzai
Anne Schmidt
Tina Hyder
Claire Naidoo
Danielle Ness
Hamid Mahamat
Kristen Parody
Leith Davis
Mark Cea
Peter Colenso
Rahul Pamnani
Shreya Prakash
Sweta Shah
Viliana Dzhartova

Hosting Entity

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