MOVING MINDS
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Early childhood development
in humanitarian standards and guidance documents

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HUMANITARIAN
COLLABORATIVE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
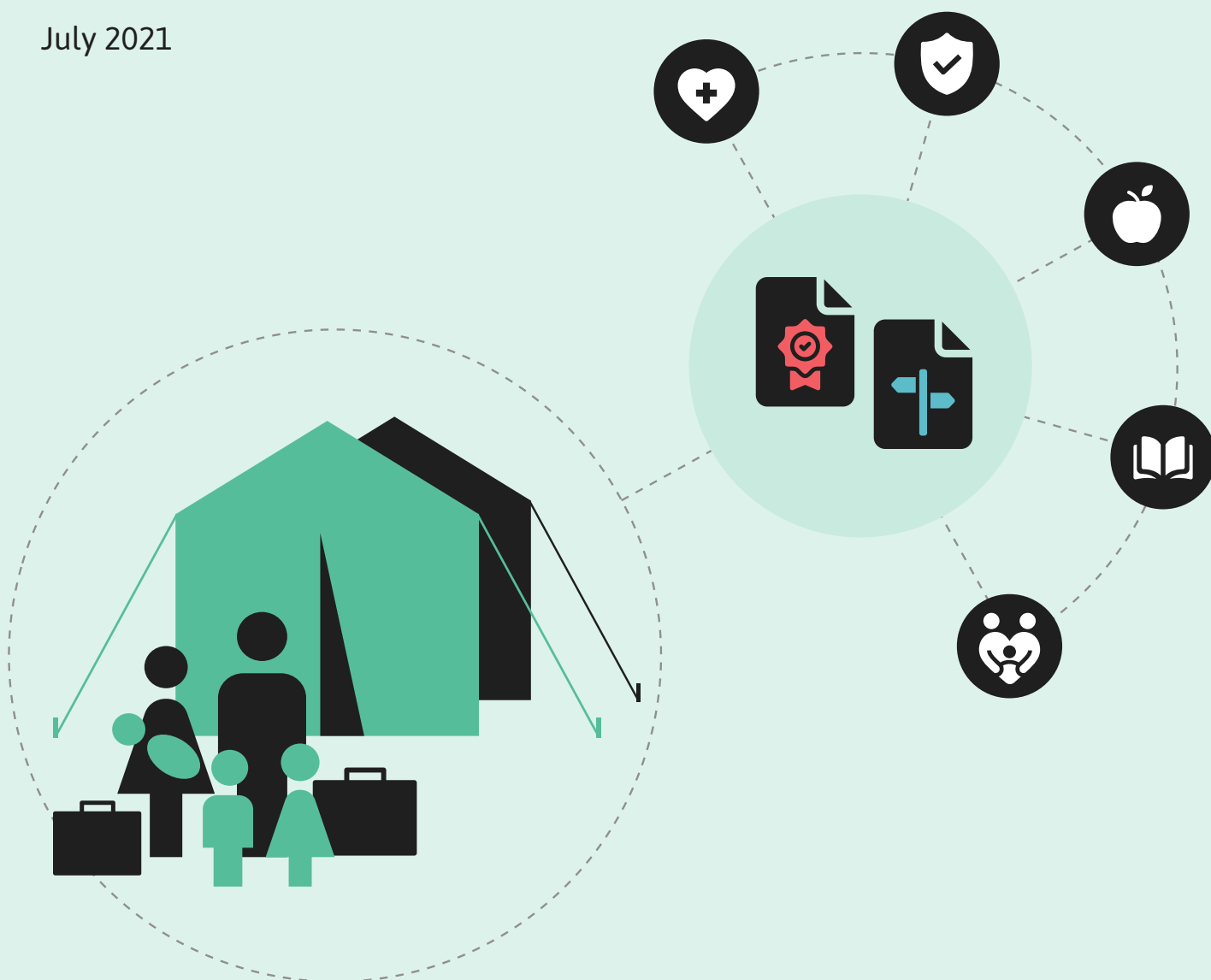
Acknowledgments

This analysis was commissioned by the Moving Minds Alliance, a funders collaborative and network that works to scale up coverage, quality, and financing of support for young children and families affected by crisis and displacement. The analysis was conducted by Lucy Bassett and Charles Bradley at the University of Virginia Humanitarian Collaborative, a research, practice, and advisory enterprise with expertise in ECD and humanitarian response.

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About the Moving Minds Alliance

Moving Minds Alliance works to scale up the financing, policies, and leadership needed to effectively support young children and families affected by crisis and displacement everywhere. Originally established in 2017 by a group of philanthropic foundations, today Moving Minds Alliance is a multi-stakeholder partnership combining programmatic, funding, and research expertise to support the prioritization of the youngest refugees and their caregivers.

Learn more: movingmindsalliance.org

About the UVA Humanitarian Collaborative

The University of Virginia (UVA) Humanitarian Collaborative aims to bridge the scholar-practitioner gap in humanitarian aid by conducting interdisciplinary research and engaging in strategic policy dialogue. One primary area of focus is early childhood development (ECD): the Humanitarian Collaborative team works with humanitarian and early childhood partners to better understand the landscape for ECD in humanitarian contexts and to create strategies, standards, policies, and programs to better support young children in such contexts.

Learn more: humanitariancollaborative.com

Contents

Acronyms

CCC	Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability
CPMS	The Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action
CRC	Conventions on the Rights of the Child
ECD	Early childhood development
ECDiE	Early childhood development in emergencies
GBV	Gender-based violence
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IAWG	Inter-Agency Working Group
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
IYCF	Infant and young child feeding
HRP	Humanitarian response plan
MMA	Moving Minds Alliance
MERS	Minimum Economic Recovery Standards
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
NCF	Nurturing Care Framework
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UVA	University of Virginia

Executive summary

Background

Substantial evidence from neuroscience to economics indicates that the early years of a child's life are critical for building the foundation for optimal development. In settings affected by crisis, conflict, disaster, and displacement, there are several reasons why children are at particular risk. Primary caregivers often have fewer resources and less time to provide children with attention and necessary socio-emotional and cognitive stimulation.[1] The risk factors that contribute to children's neglect are often multiplied in crises and conflict settings. And a family's access to early childhood development (ECD) services often becomes more challenging where family and social networks have been weakened and social service delivery interrupted.

Despite being vulnerable, young children are also tremendously adaptable and resilient. When children have appropriate support for their physical, mental, and socio-emotional needs and have close relationships with nurturing caregivers, these supports can mitigate the destabilizing effects of trauma and displacement on them. These supports may allow them to not only survive in crisis contexts, but also to thrive even in the most hostile circumstances. However, there are significant gaps in humanitarian response to address the needs of young children.

> **Despite being vulnerable, young children are also tremendously adaptable and resilient.**

[1] Masten and Narayan, 2012.

Purpose of the study

In humanitarian response, practitioners often use humanitarian standards and sector-specific guidelines to standardize the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programming. While there have been some analysis of humanitarian standards and guidance,[2] to our knowledge there has been no comprehensive review that analyzes existing humanitarian standards and guidance documents to identify alignment with ECD. To fill this gap, **this study reviews existing humanitarian standards and guidance documents and assesses the extent to which early childhood interventions and the needs of infants, young children, and caregivers are included.**

This review aims to answer the following questions:

> **To what degree do existing humanitarian standards and guidance documents explicitly recognize or acknowledge young children and their caregivers as important groups to target in humanitarian response?**

> **What are the main gaps in terms of alignment of standards and guidance documents with the Nurturing Care Framework, which outlines five areas that are essential for children's holistic development?**

> **What are recommended next steps to achieve comprehensive and consolidated guidance for addressing early childhood development in emergencies?**

We use a mixed-methods approach to answer these questions. A comprehensive desk review of 5 humanitarian standards and 10 guidance documents (Table 2) examines their:

- Degree of focus on young children and caregivers

- Alignment with the five domains of the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF): (1) Good Health, (2) Adequate Nutrition, (3) Security and Safety, (4) Responsive Caregiving, and (5) Opportunities for Early Learning (see list on page 8).[3]

In addition, we assess how well standards and guidance documents address the numerous sub-categories within each of the five NCF domains. For example, the domain Adequate Nutrition includes sub-categories of food security, maternal nutrition, breastfeeding and complementary feeding, micronutrients supplementation and fortification, nutrition during illness, and nutrition monitoring and management. Findings are reported both by domain and by sub-category.

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[2] E.g., Theirworld's discussion of *INEE Minimum Standards in the Safe Spaces* report and UNESCO's commentary on principles and standards governing humanitarian, crisis, and refugee response.

[3] WHO, UNICEF, and World Bank, 2018.

⬟ Standards

- *Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) (2019)*

- *Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery (2010)*

- *Small Enterprise, Education, and Promotion (SEEP) Network Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS) (2017)*

- *Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response (2018)*

- *UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (2015)*

⚑ Guidance documents

- *INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support (2018)*

- *Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action (2018)*

- *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (2007) and Common Measurement and Evaluation Framework (2017)*

- *IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (2019)*

- *Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings (2017)*

- *Interagency Working Group on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IFE Core Group) Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies Operational Guide (2017)*

- *Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide (2017)*

- *UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child (2018)*

- *UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) (2020)*

- *UNICEF Operational Guidelines on Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings (2018)*

This study is intended to be the first step in a process of better understanding existing standards and guidance documents and the extent to which these meet practitioner needs to support at-scale implementation of ECD services in crisis settings.

Main findings

Half the world's refugees are children—yet detailed guidance on supporting the youngest is lacking in humanitarian standards and guidance documents.

Attention to young children and caregivers is present but needs to be more detailed.

- While all 15 humanitarian standards and guidance documents reviewed address children, less than half specifically define young children.

- Two-thirds of the documents mention 'caregiver,' but only one explicitly defines the term.

Taken all together, existing humanitarian standards and guidance do an adequate job of addressing the Nurturing Care Framework's five domains, but no single set of standards or guidance documents has high alignment with all five domains.

- Overall, the Safety and Security and Good Health domains had the highest alignment with the standards and guidance documents.

- Alignment with the Opportunities for Learning domain is high in the *INEE Minimum Standards* and largely absent in other standards and guidance.

- No standards or guidance document has high alignment with the Responsive Caregiving domain, although five documents have medium alignment with this domain.

- Standards taken all together had medium to high alignment with all five NCF domains. At least one standard had high alignment with Safety and Security, Adequate Nutrition and Opportunities for Learning, but no standard had high alignment with Good Health or Responsive Caregiving.

Details matter—within each Nurturing Care Framework domain, most sub-categories are covered by at least one standard or guidance document, but gaps remain.

- There are gaps in guidance for critical populations, including care for children with developmental difficulties, nutrition for ill children, local language use, and involving fathers and extended family in nurturing care.

- The key findings on the coverage of sub-categories are described below.

Table 1 Summary of findings by Nurturing Care Framework domain

Domain	Key findings	Main gaps
Good Health	• All sub-categories are represented comprehensively by at least one standard or guidance document. • Monitoring children's physical and emotional well-being, maternal health, newborn health and care, and preventive health services are best covered. • More alignment with sub-categories in guidance documents than standards, especially those that explicitly focus on health. • Among standards, *Sphere* has the best alignment.	• **Care for children with developmental difficulties**
Safety and Security	• All sub-categories are covered to a substantial degree across standards and guidance documents, particularly standards. • Safe family and play spaces, violence prevention, and social care and social protection are best covered. • The highest alignment for this domain was found in the *CPMS* and the *Sphere Handbook* and within guidance documents in the *UNICEF Core Commitments for Children* and *IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings*.	• **Birth registration and tracing** • **Clean and sustainable environment**
Adequate Nutrition	• Alignment with sub-categories stronger in standards than guidance documents. • Breastfeeding and complementary feeding, food security, nutrition monitoring and management, and micronutrients are best covered.	• **Maternal nutrition** • **Nutrition during illness**
Opportunities for Learning	• *INEE Minimum Standards* demonstrate highest alignment with almost all sub-categories. • Caregiver support to provide learning opportunities, high-quality childcare and preschool, and information, support and counseling on learning are best covered.	• **Engagement of adult and children** • **Local language use**
Responsive Caregiving	• Caregiver mental health, play and communication, and social and community support are best covered. • Only two standards (*CPMS* and *INEE Minimum Standards*) had high alignment with at least one sub-category. • *UNICEF Community-based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings* guidance had highest alignment across sub-categories.	• **Promoting caregiver sensitivity** • **Involving fathers/ extended family**

We don't need to start from scratch—we can build on existing standards and guidance documents.

Standards holders suggested strengthening existing standards and developing new guidance documents rather than developing an entirely new set of standards for early childhood development in emergencies (ECDiE).
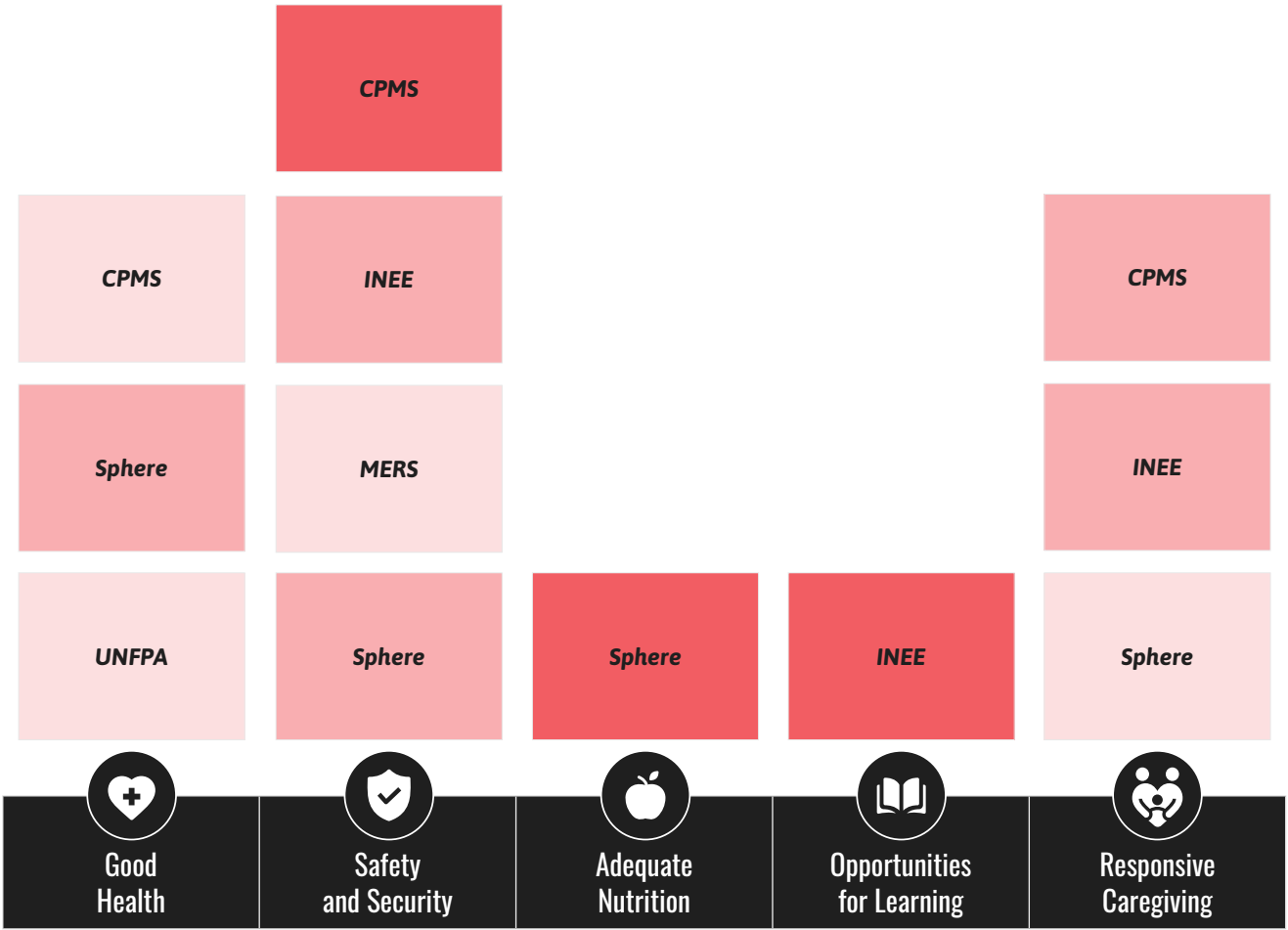
• Experts noted several opportunities to build on existing standards, create new guidance documents, and improve training.

• Some of these opportunities are time-sensitive.

Figure 1 Which standards cover aspects of the NCF?

Taken together, the five standards reviewed for this study cover all five aspects of the NCF. Some aspects, such as Safety and Security and Good Health, are covered by three or more standards documents. Adequate Nutrition and Opportunities for Learning are only covered by one, but there is a high degree of alignment with the NCF in these singular documents.

Alignment	Standards rating
High	
Medium	
Low	

	CPMS			
CPMS	INEE			CPMS
Sphere	MERS			INEE
UNFPA	Sphere	Sphere	INEE	Sphere
Good Health	**Safety and Security**	**Adequate Nutrition**	**Opportunities for Learning**	**Responsive Caregiving**

Note: This figure omits the standard documents that do not cover a particular NCF domain. Within each classification (high, medium and low alignment), the standards in this figure are organized alphabetically.

Figure 2

Figure 2 Which guidance documents cover aspects of the NCF?

All of the NCF domains are covered by at least three of the ten guidance documents reviewed for this study. Safety and Security and Good Health are covered by the most guidance documents. Similar to the standards documents, the Adequate Nutrition and Opportunities for Learning domains have less coverage than the other domains.

Alignment	Guidance rating
High	
Medium	
Low	

Good Health
- INEE PSS
- IASC inclusion Guidelines
- Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health
- IFE Core Group Feeding Guide
- Newborn Health Field Guide
- UNICEF Core Commitments
- UNICEF MHPSS

Safety and Security
- INEE PSS
- IASC Gender Handbook
- IASC MHPSS
- Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health
- IFE Core Group Feeding Guide
- Newborn Health Field Guide
- UNHCR Best Interests
- UNICEF Core Commitments
- UNICEF MHPSS

Adequate Nutrition
- Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health
- IFE Core Group Feeding Guide
- UNICEF Core Commitments

Opportunities for Learning
- INEE PSS
- IASC Gender Handbook
- IASC MHPSS
- UNICEF MHPSS

Responsive Caregiving
- INEE PSS
- IASC MHPSS
- Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health
- UNHCR Best Interests
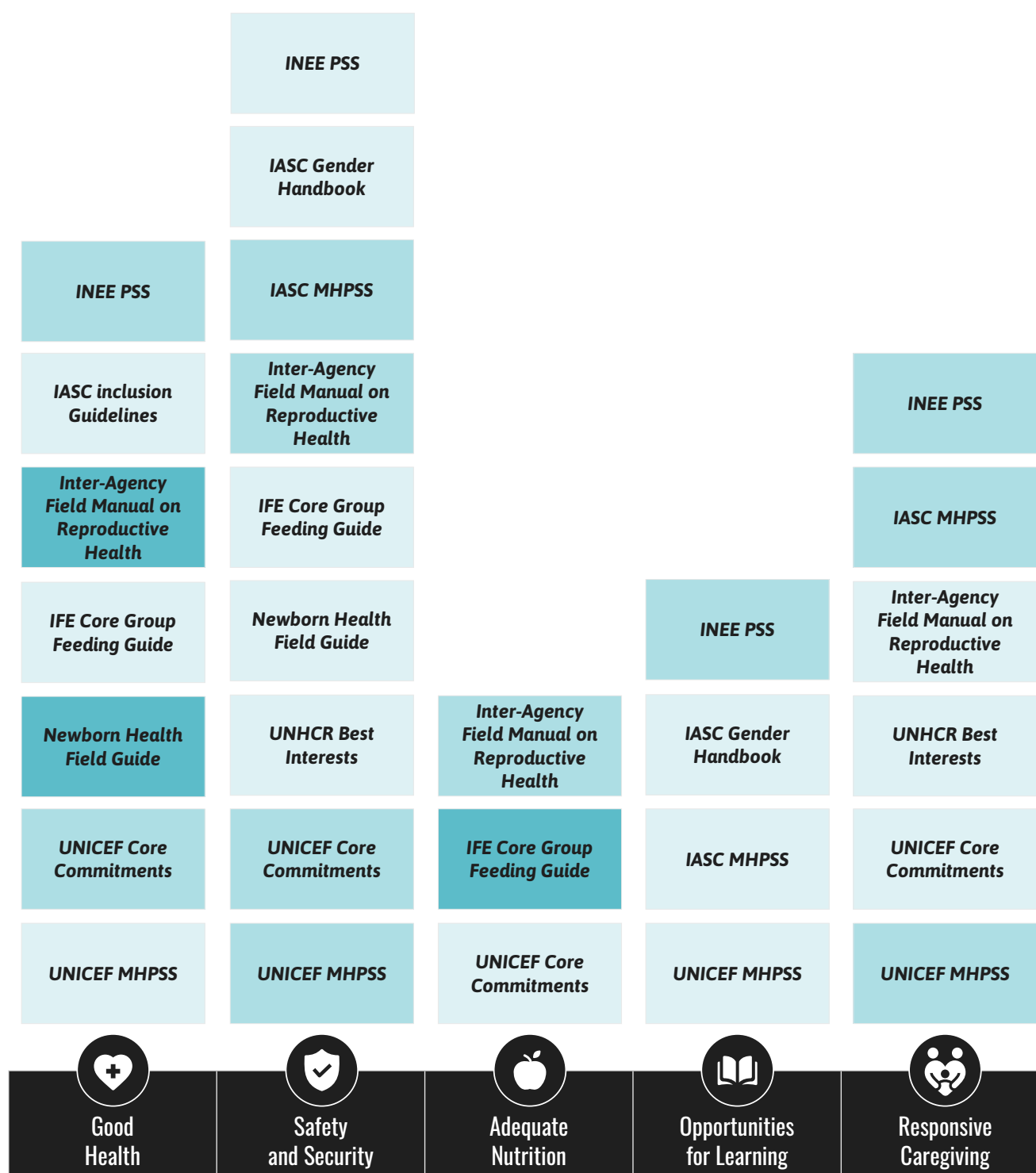- UNICEF Core Commitments
- UNICEF MHPSS

Note: This figure omits the guidance documents that do not cover a particular NCF domain. Within each classification (high, medium and low alignment), the guidance documents in this figure are organized alphabetically.

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from the desk review and interviews with standards holders:

Strengthen attention to young children and caregivers, and add missing nurturing care elements in existing humanitarian standards and guidance documents

- There is a need to add definitions of young children and caregivers to existing documents to ensure attention is paid to these groups.

- The upcoming revisions to the *INEE Minimum Standards* provide a first opportunity to do this and the INEE team has already signaled their interested in feedback.

Build on existing training opportunities to raise awareness and knowledge about ECD

There is an opportunity to build ECD content into training about standards and guidance that is already planned, such as the updated CPMS training on the 2019 *Miniumum Standards*.

Develop complementary products to accompany standards

Practitioners noted that they not only access standards and guidance documents, but also complementary accompanying products. Examples of these products include case studies, video series, webinars, podcasts, and illustrations or other visuals. Some concrete opportunities include a thematic sheet for Sphere, a pocket guide for INEE, or a video or case study for CPMS.

Develop practical guidance on holistic ECD that covers all aspects of the Nurturing Care Framework

- Guidance should include clear definitions for young children and caregivers, describe key actions/requirements for implementation for each of the 5 Nurturing Care Framework domains and sub-categories, include indicators for monitoring and evaluation (see examples in NCF annex), and use accessible language for non-experts.

- This could be a catalogue outlining where to find each of these elements in existing materials or a repackaging (and revamping) of all of this information in one place.

Conduct additional consultations and research

- It would be useful to hear from other relevant stakeholders (e.g., Humanitarian Standards Partnership; NCF Working Groups; humanitarian actors; and caregivers and children in humanitarian settings) to incorporate their perspectives into any future actions to improve standards and guidance to support ECDiE.

- It may also be useful to conduct additional research on national and organization-specific guidance, community engagement in standards and guidance, and ECDiE throughout the Humanitarian Program Cycle.

Background

Early childhood development in emergencies (ECDiE)
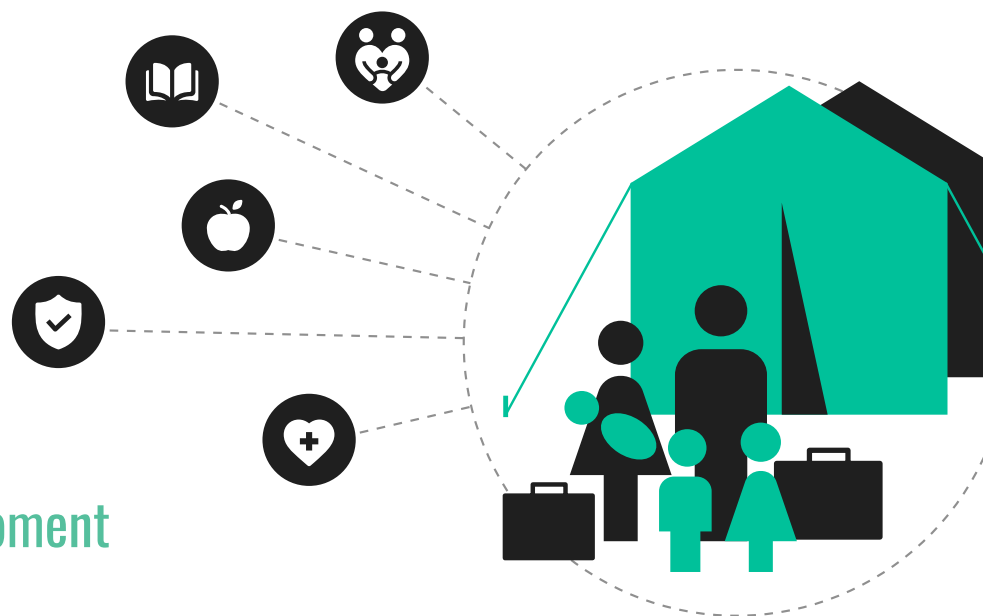
It is estimated that one in four children around the world lives in a conflict or disaster zone and more than 30 million children have been displaced by conflict.[4] Although they represent only one third of the world's population, children under age 18 account for half of all refugees (or nearly 13 million) and 40 percent of populations internally displaced by violence and conflict.[5] Given the protracted nature of modern crises—many lasting between 10 and 26 years—millions of young children will spend the entirety of their childhoods in conditions that threaten their short- and long-term development.[6]

Substantial evidence from neuroscience to economics indicates that the early years of a child's life are critical for building the foundation for optimal development. What happens during these important years can have long-term and irreversible consequences on children's ability to grow, learn, and thrive—and on future generations as well.[7]

Experiences of physical harm, psychological trauma, exploitation, and neglect can negatively influence

young children's development. In settings affected by crisis, conflict, disaster, and displacement there are several reasons why children are at particular risk. Primary caregivers often have fewer resources and less time to provide children with attention and necessary socio-emotional and cognitive stimulation.[8] The risk factors that contribute to children's neglect are often multiplied in crises and conflict settings. And a family's access to early childhood development (ECD) services often becomes more challenging where family and social networks have been weakened and social service delivery interrupted.

According to a 2018 analysis of Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs), there are significant gaps in addressing the needs of young children. The review of 26 active HRPs found that services that can protect young children in crisis are insufficient (see Figure 3). What services are available are predominantly related to health and nutrition—and even these are generally underfunded, with little attention going to critical support for safety and security, education, and responsive care services that young children and their caregivers need. The plans included only 58 percent of recommended nutrition elements, 24 percent of recommended safety and security elements, 22 percent of recommended health elements, 10 percent of recommended responsive care elements, and 9 percent of recommended early learning elements.[9] UNOCHA's financial tracking service found that out of all humanitarian response funding, it is estimated that only 2.6 percent was spent on education in 2019, and a fraction of that on early childhood education.[10]

> Substantial evidence from neuroscience to economics indicates that the early years of a child's life are critical for building the foundation for optimal development.

[4] UNOCHA, 2020.   [5] UNHCR, 2017.   [6] Shonkoff et al., 2012.   [7] UNHCR, 2017.   [8] Masten and Narayan, 2012.
[9] UNESCO, 2018. Based on recommendations in the Nurturing Care Framework.   [10] UNOCHA Financial Tracking Service, 2020.
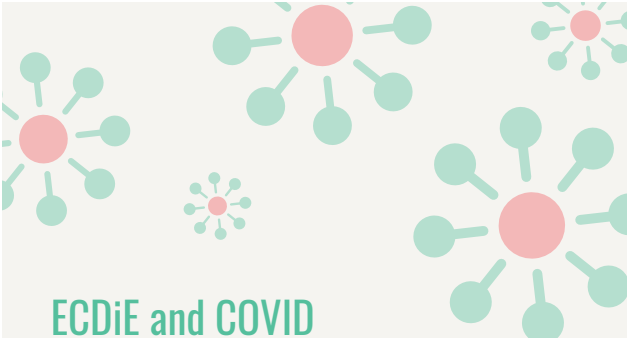
Figure 3 Elements of nurturing care in 26 active response plans

Early Learning — 9%
Caregiving — 10%
Health — 22%
Safety & Security — 24%
Nutrition — 58%
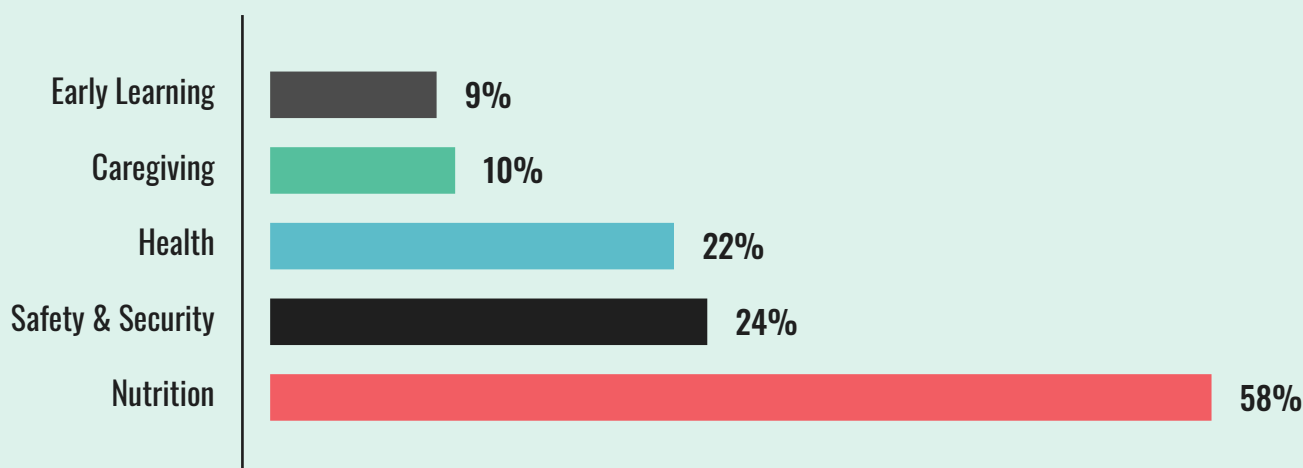
Note: See Annexes II and III in the original background paper for a fuller analysis of response plans and more detail on education and ECD in UN-led humanitarian response.

Despite being vulnerable, young children are also tremendously adaptable and resilient. Regardless of previous exposure to traumatic environments and experiences, when young children experience enriched and safe environments, they can often recover and develop the skills and abilities necessary for success in school and life.[11] In contexts of displacement and conflict, the burden to provide rich and safe developmental contexts often falls on parents and caregivers. Having attentive and supportive relationships with nurturing caregivers can mitigate the destabilizing effects of displacement on children, allowing them not only to survive in crisis contexts but also to thrive even in the most hostile circumstances.[12, 13]

In this report, we define a caregiver as any person who tends to the physical or psychological needs of a young child. This could include people from the local community, members of a religious congregation, neighbors, close friends, or a person hired specifically for providing care. The success of many ECD and ECDiE interventions hinge on creating supportive environments that enhance displaced caregivers' capacity to meet their own needs, the needs of their young children, and the needs of their community.

ECDiE and COVID

The global COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a double emergency for young children and their caregivers. COVID-induced challenges such as unemployment, food insecurity, and the closure of health, social, and educational services exacerbate an already existing humanitarian crisis situation with potentially long-lasting negative effects on the development of the youngest children.[14]

Now more than ever, organizations providing critical services to the youngest refugees need clear standards and guidance on how to stretch their resources the farthest.

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[11] Blakemore and Frith, 2005.   [12] Chrisman and Dougherty, 2014.   [13] Kirmayer et al., 2011.   [14] Moving Minds Alliance, 2020.

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Humanitarian standards and guidance

Humanitarian organizations commit to a set of core standards of quality and accountability to guide their work and improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide. The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) outlines the essential elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian aid.

In humanitarian response, practitioners often use humanitarian standards and sector-specific guidelines to standardize the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programming. Humanitarian standards aim to ensure that all people affected by crisis can exercise their human rights to protection and assistance and to live in dignity. These standards describe the broad principles and essential elements for high-quality response, reflecting best practice at a global level. They often lay out specific levels of quality, benchmarks, and actions. Figure 4 shows the seven core humanitarian standards, all of which fall under the Humanitarian Standards Partnership.

There are also guidance documents—either associated with specific standards or stand-alone—that provide additional information and recommendations on priority issues. According to the *INEE Minimum Standards*, guidance notes "cover specific points of good practice to consider when applying the minimum standards and adapting key actions in different situations." These resources are critical elements in ensuring high-quality implementation of activities.

> These resources are critical elements in ensuring high-quality implementation of activities.

Figure 4 Humanitarian Standards Partnership standards

Purpose of this study

While there are several barriers to providing quality early childhood services in humanitarian contexts, one obstacle is the limited operational guidance focused on implementation of early childhood programs and services that is integrated into the humanitarian response system.[15] To date, there has been some consideration of humanitarian standards and guidance, such as Theirworld's discussion of *INEE Minimum Standards* in the *Safe Spaces* report[16] and UNESCO's commentary on principles and standards governing humanitarian, crisis and refugee response.[17] However, to our knowledge there has been no comprehensive review that analyzes existing humanitarian standards and guidance documents to identify alignment with ECD.

To fill this gap, **this study reviews existing humanitarian standards and guidance documents and assesses the extent to which early childhood interventions and the needs of infants, young children, and caregivers are included.** To do so, we analyze how well standards and guidance align with the domains of the Nurturing Care Framework.

The concept of "nurturing care" emerged in the 2016 Lancet series, *Advancing Early Childhood Development: From Science to Scale*, and has become a widely accepted norm guiding ECD policy and programming. The Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) encompasses five areas that are essential for children's holistic development: Good Health, Adequate Nutrition, Security and Safety, Responsive Caregiving, and Opportunities for Early Learning (see Figure 5).[18]

Figure 5 Nurturing Care Framework domains

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[15] Moving Minds Alliance mapping exercise/landscape analysis.   [16] Theirworld, 2016.   [17] UNESCO, 2018.   [18] WHO, UNICEF, and World Bank, 2018.

In May 2018, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, World Bank Group, and others launched the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF), which offers strategic actions, targets, and milestones for promoting the holistic development of young children, especially from pregnancy to age 3. The NCF is also relevant for children ages 0 to 8, across multiple sectors. A thematic brief on nurturing care for children living in humanitarian settings published in January 2021 highlights actions to support young children and their families.[19]

This review aims to answer the following questions:

> **To what degree do existing humanitarian standards and guidance documents explicitly recognize or acknowledge young children and their caregivers as important groups to target in humanitarian response?**

> **What are the main gaps in terms of alignment of standards and guidance documents with the Nurturing Care Framework?**

> **What are recommended next steps to achieve comprehensive and consolidated guidance for addressing early childhood development in emergencies?**

Note that this desk review is intended to be the *first step* in a process of better understanding existing resources and the extent to which these meet practitioner needs to support at scale implementation of ECD services in crisis settings. We see this as an iterative process, with this review helping to identify what other information, analysis, and next steps are needed to ensure ECDiE is covered in humanitarian standards and guidance documents.

[19] WHO, 2021.

Methodology

This review involved two steps. First, we conducted a desk review of relevant humanitarian standards and guidance documents and prepared a draft report with initial findings. Second, we conducted key informant interviews and sought written feedback from international experts involved with the standards and guidance documents to validate our findings and incorporate additional insights. To complement these steps, we also incorporated findings from the "Assessment of ECD Programming in Humanitarian Settings,"[20] which provides perspectives from organizations working directly on ECDiE regarding standards and guidance.

Step 1:
Desk review

Step 2:
Interviews

[20] Bassett et al., forthcoming.

Selection of humanitarian standards for review

For standards, we referred to the Humanitarian Standards Partnership and looked the following standards that reasonably could be expected to address early childhood: *Sphere Handbook* (2018), *Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS)* (2019), *INEE Minimum Standards for Education* (2010), and *Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS)* (2017). We also added the *UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention, and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies* (2015). For guidance documents, we included resources that cover different organizations and relevant areas for ECD. We reviewed a total of five humanitarian standards and 10 guidance documents (see Table 2).

Table 2 15 standards and guidance documents reviewed

Standards

Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) (2019)

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery (2010)

Small Enterprise, Education, and Promotion (SEEP) Network Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS) (2017)

Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response (2018)

UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (2015)

Guidance documents

INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support (2018)

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action (2018)

IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (2007) and Common Measurement and Evaluation Framework (2017)

IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (2019)

Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings (2017)

Interagency Working Group on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IFE Core Group) Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies Operational Guide (2017)

Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide (2017)

UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child (2018)

UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) (2020)

UNICEF Operational Guidelines on Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings (2018)

Desk review methodology

We designed the methodology for this review around the objective to assess the extent to which humanitarian standards and guidance address early childhood interventions and the needs of infants, young children, and caregivers. Our focus was on assessing the breadth and the depth alignment of the standards and guidance documents with the five NCF domains.

We first defined initial codes for the five NCF domains and sub-categories, or more detailed content, of each domain. The sub-categories were derived from the description of each component of Nurturing Care as well as the specific services and interventions listed in Table 1 of the NCF document (see Annex 2 for definitions).[21]

After fine-tuning the initial codes and developing an operating rubric for intercoder reliability, we reviewed each of the standards and guidance documents using a two-phase, line-by-line qualitative coding process. This first stage of review enabled a global understanding of the content of the standards and allowed us to inductively generate codes for subsequent stages of analysis. At this time, we also consolidated redundant codes and eliminated codes deemed irrelevant or outside of the scope of the current assessment. (See Annex 2 for the final list of codes used for analysis and Annex 3 for additional methodological details).

The second stage of review involved a more granular evaluation of each of the documents using the updated codebook. During this stage we also conducted multiple checks for intercoder reliability and developed a heuristic scoring system. Then, we met as a team to triangulate and synthesize findings across all documents, domains, and sub-categories.

For our final analysis of the documents by each NCF domain sub-category, we narrowed the list to standards and guidance documents that reasonably could be expected to address that specific domain. For example, the *Minimum Economic Recovery Standards* would not be expected to include the domains Early Learning and Good Health, so it would not be included in those sections. To score each standard, we used a scoring system ranging from 0 (no mention of the sub-category) to 3 (full depth and breadth of detail) (see Table 3).

Table 3 Scoring system

Definition	⚖ Standards	⑂ Guidance
High alignment: Full depth and breadth present with extensive detail on implementation and requirements		
Medium alignment: Substantial mention of the sub-category in the document, with details on programmatic minimums, but lacking full depth and breadth		
Low alignment: Little mention of the sub-category in the document with few details and/or only in very general terms		
No mention of the sub-category in the document		

[21] Note that we made several judgments on what and how to include the elements included in the NCF. For example, we placed caregiver mental health into the Responsive Caregiving domain rather than the Good Health domain, because we are most concerned with how caregiver mental health affects young children.

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Interviews

We shared a preliminary report with findings from the desk review with those responsible for the standards and guidance documents and requested written feedback and/or a one-on-one interview. We conducted interviews via Zoom and recorded with participants' consent. We completed a total of seven interviews, representing three standards (*Sphere, CPMS,* and *INEE Minimum Standards*) and four sets of guidance documents (*IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings and Common M&E Framework, UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child, IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action,* and *UNICEF CCCs*).

Limitations and considerations

This study benefits from its mixed-methods approach, including a comprehensive desk review and key informant interviews. The desk review was characterized by a systematic approach to assessment across standards, triangulation across stages of analysis and coders, and high intercoder reliability based on agreed-upon definitions and rubrics. The key informant interviews were conducted during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this may have affected the response rate.

However, in drawing conclusions a few considerations on our methodology are worth highlighting. Despite the mixed-methods approach, this study has not been able to capture in detail what is implemented in practice and where the gaps are in translating the standards into action. The desk review was conducted before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and specific COVID-related documents were not reviewed. The interviews were completed during the early months of COVID shutdowns, which may have affected response rates and availability.
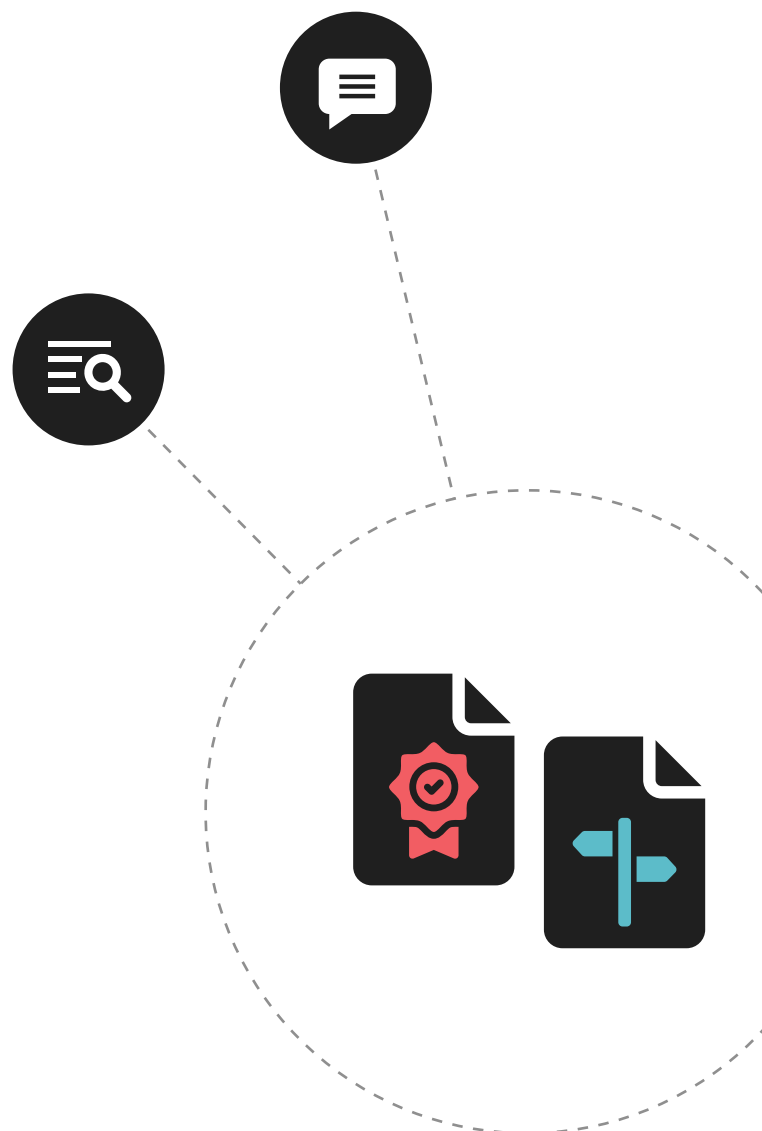
Findings

The findings cover two areas:

Findings:
Desk review

This section first presents our overall key findings from the analysis and then explains the findings for each NCF domain in more detail.

- Good Health

- Safety and Security

- Adequate Nutrition

- Opportunities for Early Learning

- Responsive Caregiving

Summary of gaps

Findings:
Interviews

In-depth key informant interviews complemented the desk review and allowed the research team to learn about experts' perspectives and insights.

Overall findings

While all of the humanitarian standards and guidance documents reviewed address children, less than half explicitly define 'young children.' Eleven of the fifteen documents reviewed mention 'caregiver,' and only one, the *UNICEF Operational Guidelines for Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings*, explicitly defines the term. Taken all together, existing humanitarian standards and guidance documents do an adequate job of collectively addressing the Nurturing Care Framework's domains. However, no existing set of humanitarian standards or guidance document represents comprehensive guidance across all five NCF domains, and none of the standards have a high degree of alignment across more than one domain.

Of the five NCF domains, Safety and Security and Good Health are the most comprehensively addressed across current humanitarian standards and guidance documents. Three out of five domains of Nurturing Care are covered to high alignment in at least one set of standards (i.e., Safety and Security by the *CPMS*, Opportunities for Early Learning by the *INEE Minimum Standards*, and Adequate Nutrition by the *Sphere Handbook*). Two of the three domains are covered to high alignment by guidance documents (Good Health by *The Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings and Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide*, and Adequate Nutrition by the *IFE Core Group Feeding Guide*). The Responsive Caregiving domain is not well addressed by any single standard or guidance document.

Explicit definition of young children and caregivers

Of the humanitarian standards and guidance documents included in this review, only 3 sets of standards and 3 guidance documents explicitly define 'young children' (see Table 4). The standards are *INEE Minimum Standards, MERS,* and *CPMS*; the guidance documents are the *UNICEF CCCs, the IASC Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings and Common Measurement and Evaluation Framework,* and the *IFE Core Group Feeding Guide*. The standards and guidance documents that do define young children, do so consistently. Five of the six documents define young children as children ages 0-8, while one, the *IFE Core Group Feeding Guide* stands apart by defining them as all children between the ages of 1 and 2. There does not seem to be much systematic divergence between guidance documents and standards in their use and definition of young children.

The *Sphere Handbook* defines children as aged 0-18 years and acknowledges that "Children's capacities and needs vary according to their biological age and stage of development" and recommends focusing on children's need by age, with proposed age groups: 0-5, 6-12, and 13-17.[22] The *Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide* and the *Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings*, while not defining young children, do define newborn status as 0-28 days of age. The other standards and guidance documents use the 0-18-year-old cutoff for children as laid out in the in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. *The Sphere Standards, INEE Minimum Standards, the UNICEF Operational Guidelines on Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings,* and the *UNICEF CCCs* are the only standards to designate a subsection of the document to ECD programming.

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[22] Sphere Standards, 2018, p. 12.

Table 4 Definitions of young children in humanitarian standards and guidance documents

⬟ Standards	Definition of young children
Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)	Early childhood defined as age 0-8 years; specifies 3 stages: babies and toddlers (0-2 years), pre-school age (3-5 years), and early school age (6-8 years)
INEE Minimum Standards for Education	'Young children' as age 0-8 years
Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS)	'Young children' defined as age 0-8 years
⊨ Guidance documents	**Definition of young children**
IASC Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings and Common M&E Framework	Early childhood defined as age 0-8 years
UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)	'Young children' defined as age 0-8 years, or age of school entry
IFE Core Group Feeding Guide	'Young children' considered those under two years old (0-23 months)

We noted that those standards which are meant to address the needs of a specific programmatic sector or sub-population, such as the *IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action*, which specifically caters to the needs of individuals with disabilities, typically do not expressly refer to young children or their needs. This leaves specific subgroups of young children and their caregivers, such as those with disabilities or those who have been victims of gender-based violence, lacking specific guidance and potentially under-addressed.

The Nurturing Care Framework defines caregiver as "a person who is very closely attached to the child and responsible for their daily care and support. Primary caregivers include parents, families, and other adults who are directly responsible for the child at home. They also include caregivers outside the home, such as people working in organized day care."[23] We note that although not explicit in this definition, caregivers can be any gender or sex, so include fathers, grandparents, and other adults.

In our analysis, caregivers are often mentioned but rarely defined. Four of the five standards mention 'caregiver' (*Sphere, CPMS, INEE Minimum Standards*, and the *UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies*). Three of the documents analyzed (*IASC Gender Handbook, UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence*, and *Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health*) only mention mothers, while the *MERS* do not mention caregivers, mothers, or fathers.

Eight of the ten guidance documents address caregivers in one fashion or another. Only the *UNICEF Operational Guidelines for Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings* explicitly defines the term:

"Caregiver *refers to those responsible for the care of children, and may include mothers and fathers, grandparents, siblings and others within the extended family network, as well as other child caregivers outside of the family network.*" (p.5)

[23] WHO, 2018, p. 47.

Alignment with the Nurturing Care Framework domains

Taken all together, existing humanitarian standards and guidance do an adequate job of addressing the Nurturing Care Framework's five domains, but no single set of standards or guidance document fully covers all domains (see Table 5). Across all documents, the domains with the highest alignment are Safety and Security and Good Health. Alignment with the Opportunities for Learning domain is high in the *INEE Minimum Standards* and largely absent in other standards and guidance. The Responsive Caregiving domain has low to medium alignment in most standards and guidance documents, but none of these documents has high alignment with this domain.

On the following page we outline findings from our analysis of the standards and guidance documents across the relevant sub-categories of each of the five NCF domains.

> Existing humanitarian standards and guidance do an adequate job of addressing the Nurturing Care Framework's five domains, but no single set of standards or guidance document fully covers all domains.

Standards

Guidance

Good Health

Safety and Security

Adequate Nutrition

Opportunities for Learning

Responsive Caregiving

Table 5 **Alignment of standards with NCF domains**

Category	Document	Good Health	Safety and Security	Adequate Nutrition	Opportunities for Learning	Responsive Caregiving
Standards	Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)	Low	High	Medium	None	Medium
	INEE Minimum Standards Handbook	None	Medium	None	High	High
	Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS)	None	Low	None	None	Low
	Sphere Handbook	Medium	Medium	High	None	Low
	UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to GBV in Emergencies	Low	None	None	None	None
Guidance documents	INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support	Medium	None	None	Medium	Medium
	IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action	None	None	None	Low	None
	IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings & Common M&E Framework	None	Medium	None	Low	Medium
	IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action	Low	None	None	None	None
	Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings	High	Medium	Medium	None	Low
	IFE Core Group Feeding Guide	Low	Low	High	None	None
	Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide	High	None	None	None	None
	UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child	None	Low	None	None	Low
	UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)	Medium	Medium	None	None	None
	UNICEF Community-Based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings	Low	Low	None	None	High

Alignment	Standards rating	Guidance rating
High		
Medium		
Low		
None		

Good Health

Young children's good health is the result of caregivers monitoring children's physical and emotional conditions, having access to and using appropriate preventative health services, and seeking care and appropriate treatment for children's illnesses. It is especially important that caregivers and families can access the full range of these services from health facilities and within their communities.

Drawing on the NCF, we analyzed the alignment of each of the standards vis-à-vis the following sub-categories for the domain of Good Health. (See Annex 2 for a more detailed description of each of the sub-categories.)

Sub-categories
Maternal health
Care for children with developmental difficulties
Monitoring children's physical and emotional well-being
Newborn health and care
Preventative health services
Care for sick children

Key findings

- All six sub-categories are represented comprehensively by at least one of the standards or guidance documents (see Table 6).

- Of the sub-categories, monitoring children's physical and emotional well-being, maternal health, newborn health and care, and preventive health services are best covered.

- There is more alignment with the Good Health NCF sub-categories within the guidance documents than standards, with the most alignment in the *Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings* and the *Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide*, notably documents that explicitly focus on health. Among standards, the *Sphere Handbook* has the best alignment.

Good Health

Table 6 Alignment of standards and guidance with Good Health domain sub-categories

	Sub-categories					
	Maternal health	Care for children with developmental difficulties	Monitoring children's physical and emotional well-being	Newborn health and care	Preventative health services	Care for sick children
Standards						
Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)			Medium		Low	Low
Sphere Handbook	Medium	Low	Medium		High	High
UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to GBV in Emergencies		Low	Low		Low	
Guidance documents						
INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support		Low	High			
IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings & Common M&E Framework			Low			
IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action	Low	High				
Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings	High	Low	High	High	High	Medium
IFE Core Group Feeding Guide	Low				Low	Low
Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide	High		High	High	Medium	Medium
UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)	Low	Low	Medium		Low	Medium
UNICEF Community-Based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings			Medium			

Alignment	Standards rating	Guidance rating
High		
Medium		
Low		
None		

❤ Good Health

Looking across standards, the *Sphere Handbook* has the highest alignment with Good Health sub-categories, especially in preventive health services and care-seeking support for sick children. The *Sphere* standards include a substantial amount of practical detail in both areas and significant detail in the other sub-categories, except newborn health and care. Among the guidance documents, the *Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings* had the highest alignment with health sub-categories followed by the *Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide*—both, explicitly focus on health.

Across all types of documents, there is the greatest alignment under the sub-category of monitoring children's physical and emotional well-being, particularly across guidance documents. The documents list symptoms for health care workers to monitor, including signs of illness, infection, malnourishment, and trauma. Two of the standards include detail in this area, with the *Sphere Handbook* focusing on health and nutrition monitoring, and the *CPMS* and *UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies* focusing on identification of child abuse and mental health. Several guidance documents (*UNICEF Community-based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings, INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support, IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings,* and *UNICEF CCCs*) include details on the psychological impacts of acute and protracted crisis on children and ways to provide (or refer children to) appropriate psychosocial care.

There is a similar level of detail and guidance regarding the sub-categories of preventative health services, care for sick children, and maternal health. For preventative health, the documents do an excellent job in guiding practitioners on which immunizations are necessary, when, and for whom. For care for sick children, the documents emphasize treatment of diarrhea and respiratory illness, among other illnesses, and also reinforce the minimum standards expected around staff preparedness and training. For maternal health, the frequency of pre- and postnatal checks, step-by-step guidance for emergency preterm labor, family planning, and post-natal feeding support were commonly addressed themes across documents and were described in detail. Common life-threatening obstetric complications and their recognition were also important within the standards. The *Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings* provides an especially detailed set of minimum response standards. The newborn health and care sub-category is only well covered in two guidance documents (*Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings* and *Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide*).

There is only high alignment for the sub-category care for children with developmental difficulties in the *IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action*; there is generally low alignment in this sub-category across the other documents.

The combined level of detail across these sub-categories offers a thoroughly detailed blueprint for guiding ECDiE practitioners working towards good health outcomes and could provide language for future ECDiE resources. No one standard or guidance document, however, covers the full set of health related ECD needs.

> The *Sphere Handbook* has the highest alignment with Good Health sub-categories, especially in preventive health services and care-seeking support for sick children.

Safety and Security

Understanding that young children cannot protect themselves and are often vulnerable to unanticipated danger, physical pain, and emotional stress, it is imperative that standards and guidance address children's safety and security. This includes the creation of safe spaces free from violence and physical danger and holistic social protection measures for young children and their caregivers to protect them from the adverse effects of poverty and to mitigate shocks.

We looked at the following sub-categories for the domain of Safety and Security. (See Annex 2 for a more detailed description of each of the sub-categories.)

Sub-categories
Violence prevention
Birth registration and tracing
Clean and sustainable environment
Safe family and play spaces
Social care and social protection

Key findings

- All five Safety and Security sub-categories are covered to a substantial degree across the standards and guidance documents with strength in the standards (see Table 7).[24]

- Safe family and play spaces, violence prevention, and social care and social protection have the strongest alignment across standards and guidance documents.

- The highest alignment for this domain was found in the *CPMS* and the *Sphere Handbook* and within guidance documents in the *UNICEF CCCs* and *IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings*.

[24] We included all standards except the SEEP Minimum Economic Recovery Standards because safety and security are important for their area of focus.

Safety and Security

Table 7 Alignment of standards with Safety and Security domain sub-categories

		Sub-categories				
		Violence prevention	Birth registration and tracing	Clean and sustainable environment	Safe family and play spaces	Social care and social protection
Standards	Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)	High	High	Medium	High	Medium
	INEE Minimum Standards Handbook	High		Medium	High	
	Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS)					Medium
	Sphere Handbook	Low	Medium	High	High	High
	UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to GBV in Emergencies					Low
Guidance documents	INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support	Low			Medium	
	IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action	Medium			Medium	
	IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings & Common M&E Framework	Low	Medium		Medium	Low
	Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings	Low				
	IFE Core Group Feeding Guide		Low			Medium
	Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide		Low		Low	
	UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child	Low			Low	Medium
	UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)	Medium	Low		Medium	
	UNICEF Community-Based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings	Low			High	

Alignment	Standards rating	Guidance rating
High		
Medium		
Low		
None		

Safety and Security

Across the humanitarian standards and guidance documents, there is attention to ensuring the safety of people forcibly displaced or in refugee contexts, with breadth of alignment across sub-categories and depth of detail within them. The combination of violence prevention and safe spaces is comprehensively covered across existing humanitarian standards and some guidance documents. For safe spaces, the documents referenced anticipating challenges around the design and construction of camps, gender-based violence (GBV) protections, barriers to education access, and locations of essential services. For violence prevention, the documents described guidelines for programming meant to prevent and address the consequences of neglect, sexual abuse, GBV, violent classroom management, and exploitation.

Birth registration and tracing were addressed by several standards and guidance documents, but most comprehensively by the *CPMS*, which details the frequency and manner humanitarian staff should engage in registration services, what locations make ideal registration points, case management conventions, and conditions for reunification. Clean and sustainable environment is only covered with high alignment by the *Sphere Handbook* and hardly at all in the guidance documents.

The *Sphere Handbook* stands out in the Safety and Security domain, extensively addressing issues surrounding cleanliness, environmental sustainability, safe spaces, and social protection mechanisms. The *Sphere Handbook* provides detailed guidance on maintaining clean water supplies, sources of environmental pollution, and the procedures, roles, and responsibilities of humanitarian actors in the provision of cash delivery systems.

Regarding social care and social protection, across standards documents, cash delivery is touted as an effective direct intervention. The *Sphere Handbook* provides the most detail for how practitioners can effectively and equitably promote cash-based social protection mechanisms. The *CPMS* places the most attention on children, referring to cash assistance for child-victims of armed forces recruitment, cash assistance and child labor, social protection actions for child heads of household, and child inclusion in decision-making for social protection programming. A few other examples include the following:

- *The Inter-Agency Field Manual* references using cash programs to offset the costs of maternal healthcare and financing mechanisms for contraception.

- *The IASC Gender for Humanitarian Action Handbook* discusses providing childcare as a cash-for-work opportunity for mothers who are home based.

- *The UNICEF CCCs* mention ECD social protection/cash through the lens of protecting the most vulnerable groups.

> The combination of violence prevention and safe spaces is comprehensively covered across existing humanitarian standards and some guidance documents.

Adequate Nutrition

A mother's nutrition during pregnancy affects her health and well-being, as well as the child's mental and physical development. Children under 6 months flourish on exclusive breastfeeding, and children ages 6 months and above need complementary foods that contain the micronutrients necessary for rapid brain and body growth. Food safety and family food security are essential elements that undergird safe, predictable, and suitable nutrition programming for young children.

We looked at the following sub-categories for the domain Adequate Nutrition. (See Annex 2 for a more detailed description of each of the sub-categories.)

Sub-categories

Food security

Maternal nutrition

Breastfeeding and complementary feeding

Micronutrients and fortification

Nutrition during illness

Nutrition monitoring and management

Key findings

- Alignment with the Adequate Nutrition sub-categories is stronger in the standards than the guidance documents (see Table 8).

- The sub-categories breastfeeding and complementary feeding, food security, nutrition monitoring and management, and micronutrients have the highest alignment across the standards and guidance documents.

- Maternal nutrition and nutrition during illness are the sub-categories least well covered.

Adequate Nutrition

Alignment of standards with Adequate Nutrition domain sub-categories

	Sub-categories					
	Food security	Maternal nutrition	Breastfeeding and complementary feeding	Micronutrients and fortification	Nutrition during illness	Nutrition monitoring and management
Standards						
Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)	High	Low	High		Medium	
Sphere Handbook	High	Medium	High	Low	High	High
Guidance documents						
IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action			Low		Low	
IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings & Common M&E Framework	Low					
IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action		Low				
Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings	Medium	Medium				High
IFE Core Group Feeding Guide	High	Low	Low		High	Medium
Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide		Low				
UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)	Low		Medium			
UNICEF Community-Based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings	Low					

Alignment	Standards rating	Guidance rating
High		
Medium		
Low		
None		

Adequate Nutrition

Young child feeding—breastfeeding and complementary feeding—is of paramount concern for ECDiE nutrition programming. The *Sphere Handbook* and *CPMS* provide explicit details for nutrition teams in the preparation of families for breastfeeding, the manner, duration, and age range for quality breastfeeding, and cross-sector potential for engaging breastfeeding mothers. Complementary feeding is also addressed across relevant standards, but the *Sphere Handbook*, by far, provides the most detail and granular guidance for nutrition teams regarding complementary feeding, including guidance about when and why complementary feeding should take place and how to prepare for pre-existing nutrient gaps as young children transition from breast milk to complementary foods. The *IFE Core Group Feeding Guide* gives additional details on how complementary feeding interventions can be supported with cash or voucher schemes.

Food security is well covered in the standards. Consistent access to food and the individual, family, and community-level factors that support or threaten food security are detailed heavily in the *Sphere Handbook*. This meticulous approach is extended both to children and their caregivers, up to and inclusive of establishing of safe distribution sites, child-friendly messaging, separation of pregnant women and children for distribution and registration processes, and integrating child protection focal points into food security teams.

Appropriate and timely support of infant and young children feeding in emergencies saves lives. For practitioners to provide appropriate nutritional support for children and caregivers, they must have processes in place to monitor and manage programming and its effects. In our analysis, the *Sphere Handbook* again stands out in its detailing of monitoring mechanisms for practitioners.

The Handbook describes how monitoring and evaluation can and should be equitable and detailed, building a dataset that is disaggregated by age, sex, and randomly sampled, if possible. The *IFE Core Group Feeding Guide* also details ways monitoring efforts can be coordinated with national governments and how coordination across sectors can create holistic management processes that address nutritional needs of children throughout their social lives.

Regarding micronutrients, documents included age groups particularly vulnerable to micronutrient deficiency, types of fortification and micronutrient supplements, and specific dosages for pregnant women, children, and their caregivers.

While addressing nutrition challenges during child illness and comprehensive guidance on maternal nutrition are much less well covered, the *IFE Core Group Feeding Guide* does provide guidance on how practitioners can anticipate and assess the effect of infectious disease outbreaks on infant and young child feeding (IYCF) guidance that is severely relevant in today's context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. It is critical that humanitarian standards and guidance documents fill these acute gaps. Nutrition during illness and maternal nutrition represent areas where humanitarian workers who are relying heavily on standards for programmatic guidance might find themselves missing important information necessary for addressing holistic nutritional needs in ECDiE programming.

> Young child feeding—breastfeeding and complementary feeding—is of paramount concern for ECDiE nutrition programming.

Opportunities for Early Learning

Children do not start to learn only when they begin kindergarten or pre-primary classes; but instead learning begins at conception. In the earliest years, babies build skills and capacities through interactions, such as smiling and eye contact, talking and singing, imitation, and simple games. Children learn best when they receive safe and affectionate caregiving from adults.

We looked at the following sub-categories for the domain Opportunities for Early Learning. (See Annex 2 for a more detailed description of each of the sub-categories.)

Sub-categories

Support for caregivers to provide learning opportunities

Good quality childcare and preschool

Engagement of adults and children

Local language use

Information, support, and counseling on learning opportunities

Key findings

- The sub-categories focused on support for learning (caregiver support to provide learning opportunities, high-quality childcare and preschool, and information, support, and counseling on learning) had the highest alignment across standards and guidance (see Table 9). Local language use was the sub-category with the lowest alignment.

- The *INEE Minimum Standards* demonstrates the highest alignment with almost all of the Opportunities for Early Learning sub-categories.

- Among guidance documents, there was more variation in sub-categories covered with the *INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support* having the highest alignment with the sub-categories in this domain, except in local language use.

Table 9 Alignment of standards with Opportunities for Early Learning domain sub-categories

	Sub-categories				
	Support for caregivers to provide learning opportunities	Good quality childcare and preschool	Engagement of adults and children	Local language use	Information, support and counseling on learning opportunities
Standards					
Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)	High	Low		Low	Medium
INEE Minimum Standards Handbook		High	Medium		
Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS)					Medium
Sphere Handbook	Low				Low
UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to GBV in Emergencies	Low				
Guidance documents					
INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support	Low				High
IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action					
IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings & Common M&E Framework	High	High	Low		Low
Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings	Medium				
UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child		Low		Low	
UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)	Medium				Low
UNICEF Community-Based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings	High		Medium	Medium	High

Alignment	Standards rating	Guidance rating
High		
Medium		
Low		
None		

📖 Opportunities for Early Learning

Collectively, the humanitarian standards and guidance documents provide solid guidance on the sub-categories focused on support for learning (caregiver support to provide learning opportunities and information, high-quality childcare and preschool, and support and counseling on learning). Caregiver support to provide learning opportunities includes opportunities for caregivers to talk about their children's learning and to provide feedback on their children's education, as well as teacher-caregiver communication. The *INEE Minimum Standards* discuss the importance of establishing parent-teacher organizations and school management committees based in the community and establishing barrier-free pathways to community-generated learning development plans. For good quality childcare and preschool, common themes across standards and guidance include best practices around scheduling classes and the school year, curricula, textbooks and supplementary materials, credentials, addressing barriers to enrollment, and the creation of safe, child-friendly spaces for students, teachers, and staff.

Encouraging engagement among adults and children includes programmatic elements designed to promote interaction between young children, caregivers, and older members of the community and between young children and other children of varying age. This sub-category had fairly low alignment across standards and guidance documents. Where it was present (e.g., in the *UNICEF Community-Based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings* guidance, *INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support,* and *INEE Minimum Standards*) included raising awareness of distress reactions of children in emergencies, according to age and developmental stage, promoting positive parenting knowledge and skills among caregivers, and involving youth and adolescents in activities with younger children.

Using local language is frequently and comprehensively referenced in the *INEE Minimum Standards*, but to a much lesser degree in other standards and guidance documents. For example, the *INEE Minimum Standards* mandate that all early childhood education programming be available in the languages of the learners and that teachers who speak the mother tongue of young learners should be prioritized in recruitment, but no other standards or guidance documents reference the language of instruction.

Overall, the *INEE Minimum Standards* does the most for setting standards for Opportunities for Learning, showing high alignment with all sub-categories except that of engagement of adults and children (for which it has medium alignment and a focus on teachers rather than parents or caregivers). Still, there remains an emphasis on formal education settings within the documents analyzed. Because much of the education programming for young children falls outside of formal contexts, this leaves ECD education programming underdeveloped in humanitarian standards and guidance documents. A focus on more granular guidance is necessary for helping ECDiE practitioners support learning for young children, their caregivers, and their communities in humanitarian contexts.

> More granular guidance is necessary for helping ECDiE practitioners support learning for young children, their caregivers, and their communities in humanitarian contexts.

Responsive Caregiving

Responsive caregiving is more than protecting children against injury; it includes observing and responding to children's movements, sounds, gestures, and verbal requests. It also incorporates responsive feeding, enriched learning, and recognizing and responding to illness. Responsive caregiving can involve actions by mothers, fathers, grandparents, or other caregivers.

We looked at the following sub-categories for the domain Responsive Caregiving. (See Annex 2 for a more detailed description of each of the sub-categories.)

Sub-categories

Play and communication between caregiver and child

Promoting caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness

Social and community support

Involving fathers and extended family

Support for caregiver mental health

Key findings

- The sub-categories support for caregiver mental health, play and communication, and social and community support had the highest level of alignment among the relevant humanitarian standards and guidance documents (see Table 10).

- Of the humanitarian standards, only two (the *CPMS* and *INEE Minimum Standards*) had high alignment with at least one sub-category.

- Among guidance documents, the *UNICEF Community-based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings* guidance had highest alignment across sub-categories.

- Guidance on promoting more conscious and sensitive caregiving and the involvement of fathers and extended family remains weak within existing standards and couched in general terms.

Responsive Caregiving

Table 10 Alignment of standards with Responsive Caregiving domain sub-categories

		Sub-categories				
		Play and communication between caregiver and child	Promoting caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness	Social and community support	Involving fathers and extended family	Support for caregiver mental health
Standards	Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium
	INEE Minimum Standards Handbook		High	Medium		
	Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS)					Medium
	Sphere Handbook	Low				Low
	UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to GBV in Emergencies	Low				
Guidance documents	INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support	Low				High
	IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action					
	IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings & Common M&E Framework	High	High	Low		Medium
	Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings	Medium				
	UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child		Low		Medium	
	UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)	Medium		Low	Low	Low
	UNICEF Community-Based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings	High		High	Medium	High

Alignment	Standards rating	Guidance rating
High		
Medium		
Low		
None		

Responsive Caregiving

The *CPMS* and *IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings* do the most to standardize responsive caregiving in humanitarian contexts, especially concerning caregiver mental health. This is critical for responsive caregiving because good mental health can enable caregivers to manage their own emotions and reactions, recognize children's needs and respond appropriately, and empathize with a young child's challenges.[25] Many other standards and guidance documents have low to medium alignment with the caregiver mental health sub-category.

There is significant attention to play and communication between caregiver and child in several standards, but only two of the guidance documents. The *IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings* detail the need for play spaces that facilitate nurturing care and encourage ECDiE workers to train parents, sibling, grandparents, and youth to work with available staff as volunteers in play spaces. The *INEE Minimum Standards* includes details on play:

"Young children learn through play. Their learning should be based on active play and interaction. Guided play may build skills and relationships with both peers and teachers. Parents and primary caregivers of very young children should be supported to understand and apply: the importance of being responsive and sensitive to the needs of

the children; ways to care for younger children; play methods should actively engage children in the learning process and promote their development" (p.87)

Across the analysis, there is little reference to using household or other local items for play, an important part of sustainable forms of caregiver-child play in resource-scarce settings.[26] This represents an area for significant expansion in future standards or guidance.

Guidance on promoting more responsive and sensitive caregiving, or caregiver responsiveness to children's cues for play and health-related family support, and the involvement of fathers and extended family remains weak and couched in general terms. More detailed guidance for ECDiE actors is needed to effectively promote responsive caregiving.

> Across the analysis, there is little reference to using household or other local items for play, an important part of sustainable caregiver-child play in resource scarce settings.

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[25] WHO, 2018.

[26] One example reference is "teachers should learn how to create effective and appropriate teaching aids using locally available materials." *INEE Standards*, p.87.

Summary of gaps

The main gaps identified in this review are related to explicit attention to young children and areas of the Nurturing Care Framework that are missing from standards. Only 6 of the 15 standards and guidance documents define young children (3 standards and 3 guidance documents). This is a critical first step in placing necessary attention on this age group and ensuring the requisite response is supported. Moreover, while 11 of the 15 documents analyzed mention 'caregiver,' only one explicitly defines the term. Attention to caregivers of all types is critical to effectively provide support for children's optimal development.

Of the NCF domains, there are examples of strong alignment, but gaps remain in several sub-categories under each domain (e.g., nutrition during illness, birth registration and tracing, supporting caregiver responsiveness, sustainable play practices, and engaging fathers and other caregivers, etc.). Responsive Caregiving is not well addressed by any single standard.

Finally, there is currently no consolidated single package of standards and guidance for ready use by ECD practitioners in the field. For humanitarian actors that want to cover all domains of the NCF, the current fragmentation of ECDiE-relevant guidance does not make this easy. Indeed, it would take a very proactive and dedicated practitioner, with time on their hands and keen knowledge of the universe of humanitarian standards, to find all the necessary information.

> There is currently no consolidated single package of standards and guidance for ready use by ECD practitioners in the field.

Overall findings

In-depth key informant interviews complemented the desk review and allowed the research team to learn about experts' perspectives and insights. This proved especially useful for illuminating ways in which current standards and guidance documents can be recast, expanded, or adapted for users in the field. We reached out to experts responsible for the original set of the 12 standards and guidance documents reviewed in the first stage of the desk review and were able to receive feedback on 9 of the 12 standards and guidance documents. We conducted seven interviews, covering three sets of standards and four guidance documents and received sample products from three of the sets of standards.

All feedback was positive, with experts appreciating this review and recognizing the value of greater attention to ECD in humanitarian standards and guidance. There was a strong cooperative spirit among all interviewees and several invitations for future collaboration. Recommendations centered on three key areas: building on what exists, developing more concrete implementation guidance, and designing complementary products.

Several respondents emphasized the importance of building on what already exists rather than starting from scratch and suggested specific opportunities to do so. For example, the upcoming revisions to the *INEE Minimum Standards* can involve a review and addition of more ECD. Also, it is important to build onto training that's already planned, such as the updated CPMS training on the 2019 *Minimum Standards*.

Numerous interviewees commented on the need for more instructional guidance on ECD and its application when caring for children, noting that standards are not positioned to provide the level of detail needed for high-quality implementation of ECD activities across sectors. This was confirmed by ECDiE

practitioners in the "Assessment of ECD Programming in Humanitarian Settings." Such guidance could take the form of a practical field guide for practitioners who are not well versed in ECD, including definitions, step-by-step guidance on how to implement activities in the field, simple monitoring tools, checklists, etc. Interviewees highlighted the importance of using language that non-ECD experts already know and avoiding new vocabulary like "nurturing care." Some suggested outlining entry points by sector and providing concrete examples of activities by age range in different contexts, perhaps from the perspective of a child, making it more of a story. Others suggested including examples from different organizations of good practice.

There was consensus from both the interviews with standards holders and the "Assessment of ECD Programming in Humanitarian Settings" practitioners that complementary products that accompany standards and guidance documents are useful. Field workers prefer information in short, digestible formats and would like to access many of these online or digitally. Some examples of such products include case studies, video series, webinars, podcasts, and illustrations or other visuals. Some concrete opportunities to create these products for ECD include preparing a thematic sheet for Sphere, a pocket guide for INEE, or a video or case study for CPMS.

> Recommendations centered on three key areas: building on what exists, developing more concrete guidance implementation, and designing complementary products.

Main findings

Attention to young children and caregivers is present, but should be more detailed.

Defining young children and caregivers is critical in placing necessary attention on these target groups and ensuring an appropriate response. While all 15 humanitarian standards and guidance documents reviewed address children, less than half define young children (3 standards and 3 guidance documents). Two-thirds of the documents mention 'caregiver,' but only one explicitly defines the term.

Taken all together, existing humanitarian standards and guidance do an adequate job of addressing the Nurturing Care Framework's five domains, but no single set of standards or guidance document has high alignment with all five domains.

This finding is not surprising given the multisectoral nature of ECD and the mostly sectoral nature of humanitarian standards. The NCF domains with highest overall alignment are Safety and Security and Good Health. Alignment with the Opportunities for Learning domain is high in the *INEE Minimum Standards* and largely absent in other standards and guidance. No standards or guidance document has high alignment with the Responsive Caregiving domain, although five documents have medium alignment with this domain.

Taken all together, **standards** had medium to high alignment with all five NCF domains. At least one standard had high alignment with Safety and Security, Adequate Nutrition and Opportunities for Learning, but no standard had high alignment with Good Health or Responsive Caregiving.

At least one **guidance** document had high alignment with Good Health and Adequate Nutrition, but no guidance document had high alignment with Opportunities for Learning, Safety and Security, or Responsive Caregiving.

Within each Nurturing Care Framework domain, most sub-categories are covered by at least one standard or guidance document, but gaps remain.

Table 1 summarizes findings on alignment of standards and guidance documents by NCF domain.

Table 1 (Repeated from page 10) Summary of findings by NCF domain

Domain	Key findings	Main gaps
Good Health	• All sub-categories are represented comprehensively by at least one standard or guidance document. • Monitoring children's physical and emotional well-being, maternal health, newborn health and care, and preventive health services are best covered. • More alignment with sub-categories in guidance documents than standards, especially those that explicitly focus on health. • Among standards, *Sphere* has the best alignment.	• **Care for children with developmental difficulties**
Safety and Security	• All sub-categories are covered to a substantial degree across standards and guidance documents, particularly standards. • Safe family and play spaces, violence prevention, and social care and social protection are best covered. • The highest alignment for this domain was found in the *CPMS* and the *Sphere Handbook* and within guidance documents in the *UNICEF CCCs* and *IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings*.	• **Birth registration and tracing** • **Clean and sustainable environment**
Adequate Nutrition	• Alignment with sub-categories stronger in standards than guidance documents. • Breastfeeding and complementary feeding, food security, nutrition monitoring and management, and micronutrients are best covered.	• **Maternal nutrition** • **Nutrition during illness**
Opportunities for Learning	• *INEE Minimum Standards* demonstrate highest alignment with almost all sub-categories. • Caregiver support to provide learning opportunities, high-quality childcare and preschool, and information, support and counseling on learning are best covered.	• **Engagement of adult and children** • **Local language use**
Responsive Caregiving	• Caregiver mental health, play and communication, and social and community support are best covered. • Only two standards (*CPMS* and *INEE Minimum Standards*) had high alignment with at least one sub-category. • *UNICEF Community-based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings* guidance had highest alignment across sub-categories.	• **Promoting caregiver sensitivity** • **Involving fathers/ extended family**

Standards holders suggested strengthening existing standards and developing new guidance documents rather than developing an entirely new set of standards for ECDiE.

Experts noted several opportunities to build on existing standards, create new guidance documents, and improve training. Some of these opportunities are time-sensitive, so coordination should begin in short order.

Recommendations

We provide recommendations for the next steps in ensuring attention to young children and caregivers in humanitarian standards and guidance as well as options for further consultations and additional research.

Strengthen attention to young children and caregivers, and add missing nurturing care elements in existing humanitarian standards and guidance documents

There is a need to add definitions of young children and caregivers to existing documents to ensure attention is paid to these groups and fill gaps related to the NCF domains and sub-categories that are missing in standards and guidance. The upcoming revisions to the *INEE Minimum Standards* provide a first opportunity to do this and the INEE team has already signaled their interested in feedback.

Build on existing training to raise awareness and knowledge about ECD

There is an opportunity to build ECD content onto training about standards and guidance that is already planned, such as the updated CPMS training on the 2019 *Minimum Standards*.

Develop complementary products to accompany standards

Some examples of these products include case studies, video series, webinars, podcasts, and illustrations or other visuals. Some concrete opportunities include a thematic sheet for Sphere, a pocket guide for INEE, or a video or case study for CPMS.

Develop practical guidance on holistic ECD that covers all aspects of the Nurturing Care Framework

Guidance should include clear definitions for young children and caregivers, describe key actions/requirements for implementation for each of the five Nurturing Care Framework domains and sub-categories, include indicators for monitoring and evaluation (see examples in NCF annex), and use accessible language for non-experts. This could be a catalogue outlining where to find each of these elements in existing materials or a repackaging (and revamping) of all of the information in one place.

Conduct additional consultations and research

The UVA Humanitarian Collaborative was asked to present this report to the Humanitarian Standards Partnership and NCF Working Groups, both of which could be key allies in advancing next steps. It would also be beneficial to consult with field coordinators, Cluster coordinators, and other humanitarian actors and with caregivers and children in crisis to hear important perspectives on what these groups want and need and how standards and guidance documents could address them.

It may also be useful to conduct additional research into some of the following areas:

- How well do national and organization-specific guidance address the needs of young children and caregivers and what elements of these documents could be shared?

- How well do the standards and guidance address children's needs in different humanitarian contexts and what is needed in future documents?

- How do (and should) standards and guidance orient multi-sector/agency/cluster coordination given that ECD depends on multiple sectors for its success?

- What are the considerations to foster promotion and uptake of ECDiE standards and guidance in relation to the localization agenda and how can community voices be included in future iterations?

- How can ECDiE standards and guidance promote data responsibility and security, etc.?

- How is ECDiE addressed throughout the Humanitarian Program Cycle and Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability?

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Annex 1

Description of standards and guidance reviewed

⬢ Standards

Alliance for Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) (2019)

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (the Alliance) is a global network of operational agencies, academic institutions, policymakers, donors, and practitioners whose mission is to support the efforts of humanitarian actors to achieve high-quality and effective child protection interventions in humanitarian settings. First published in 2012, and now again in 2019, these *Minimum Standards* are intended for use by all humanitarian actors, with a special emphasis on those working in child protection directly with children, families, and communities. The standards are meant for use throughout every phase of humanitarian action and should help support accountability between humanitarian workers and affected populations. In these standards, 'child' refers to any person under the age of 18. Early childhood is defined as ages 0 to 8 years and is then broken up into three stages: babies and toddlers: ages 0–2 years; pre-school age: ages 3–5 years; and early school age: ages 6–8 years.

Read online here.

INEE Minimum Standards for Education (2010)

The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) describes itself as 'an open global network of practitioners and policy makers' that works to ensure all persons the right to quality education and safe learning environment in emergencies through to recovery. The *INEE Minimum Standards* contains 19 standards specifically targeting the quality of education preparedness, response, and recovery to and from disasters. *The INEE Minimum Standards* define the 'child' as all people between 0 and 18 years of age and define 'young children' as aged 0-8 years.

Read online here, and access other languages here.

SEEP Network Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS) 2017

SEEP, the Small Enterprise, Education and Promotion Network, was established in 1985 as a global learning network with 118-member organizations across 170 countries worldwide, with a focus on improving opportunities for vulnerable populations to participate in markets and improve their quality of life. Relevant for any intervention that will interact with a market, the target use audience for the MERS is 'anyone planning or implementing economic or livelihood programs in a humanitarian context.' Donors, government, private-sector actors, and evaluation staff should all reference the standards for designing or reviewing project activities. While there is no explicit definition of children in this document, MERS is suggested to be implemented alongside the *INEE Minimum Standards*, which presumes the 'child' as all people between 0 and 18 years of age and defines 'young children' as aged 0–8 years.

Read online here, and access other languages here.

Sphere Handbook (2018)

Sphere, created in 1997 by a group of NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, was designed to improve the quality of humanitarian response and make humanitarians accountable for their actions. Intended users of the *Sphere Handbook* include humanitarian practitioners involved in planning, managing, or implementing a humanitarian response. The *Sphere Handbook* aligns with the Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which states that 'child' means every person under the age of 18, but it also advocates for data disaggregation among children under age 5 to be broken down into 0–5 months, 6–11 moths, 12–23 months, and 24–59 months intervals.

Read online here, and access other languages here.

UNFPA Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, 2015

The *UNFPA Minimum Standards* comprise a set of 18-interconnected standards intended to guide and strengthen programming within existing health and protection systems in humanitarian contexts through prioritizing action to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. As the co-lead with UNICEF for the Area of Responsibility of the Global Protection Cluster, the standards were created in response to UNFPA's mandate to coordinate GBV prevention and response in emergencies. Children are mentioned throughout this document, making it relevant to the scoping process; and although not explicitly stated in this document, it being a publication in response to its cluster responsibilities, an IASC, and thus, CRC definition of a 'child' (age 0–18 years) is assumed.

Read online here.

⊩ Guidance documents

INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support (2018)

The Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support was developed for all professionals who carry out or support formal and non-formal educational activities for children and youth during humanitarian crises. Relevant implementation contexts include political conflicts, violence-affected regions, man-made and natural disasters, and countries or regions experiencing a health crisis. The Guidance Note specifically focuses on the needs of front-line humanitarian and education practitioners, including teachers, principals, counselors, administrators, and managers of child-friendly spaces. It is also useful for government entities, policymakers, community groups, parents, and families for planning, programming, policy, and advocacy purposes, and for the Education Cluster and other education coordination or working groups.

Read online here, and access other languages here.

IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action (2018)

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), established in 1991, is the longest-standing and highest-level humanitarian coordination forum of the UN System.[27] *The Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action* is intended to provide humanitarian actors with guidance on gender analysis, planning, and actions to ensure that the needs of women, girls, men, and boys are considered in all aspects of humanitarian response. The handbook adheres to a CRC definition of a 'child' (age 0–18 years).

Read online here, view the online version here, and access other languages here.

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[27] Per the IASC home page: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/the-inter-agency-standing-committee

IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (2007) and *Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (2017)*

The *IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings* are intended to enable all humanitarian actors, not solely mental health and psychosocial workers, to plan, establish and coordinate a set of minimum multi-sectoral responses to protect and improve people's mental health and psychosocial well-being in the midst of an emergency. The focus of the guidelines is on implementing 'minimum responses,' which are essential, high-priority responses that should be implemented as soon as possible in an emergency. Children are mentioned throughout this document, making it relevant to the scoping process, and although not explicitly stated in this document, all IASC publications are aligned with a CRC definition of a 'child' (age 0–18 years).

The *Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework* was designed by the IASC to provide guidance in the assessment, research, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of mental health and psychosocial support programs in emergency settings, including protracted crises. It is intended for personnel who are directly or indirectly engaged in programs that aim to influence mental health and psychosocial well-being of others— including mental health professionals, child-protection actors or educators, faith communities, or program managers. Children are mentioned throughout this document, making it relevant to the scoping process, and although not explicitly stated in this document, all IASC publications are aligned with a CRC definition of a 'child' (age 0–18 years).

Read the *Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings* online here, and view the online version here. Read the *Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework* online here.

IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (2019)

The *IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action* set out essential actions that humanitarian actors must take to effectively identify and respond to the needs and rights of persons with disabilities who are most at risk of being left behind in humanitarian settings. The intended users of the guidelines are primarily national, regional, and international humanitarian actors who are involved in policymaking, coordination, programming, and funding. The Guidelines adhere to a CRC definition of a 'child' (age 0–18 years).

Read online here, and access other languages here.

Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings (2017)

The *Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings* is a publication of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises and involved engagement with hundreds of representatives from United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. It is intended for wide application, by humanitarian practitioners and planners, in contexts beyond refugee situations, extending diverse crises, including conflict zones, and natural disasters. The *Field Manual* adheres to a CRC definition of a 'child' (age 0–18 years), defines 'newborn' as age 0–28 days, and disaggregates humanitarian interventions with medically determined age cutoffs.

Read online here, and access other languages here.

Interagency Working Group on Infant and Young Child Feeding: Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies Operational Guide (2017)

The *Operational Guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies (OG-IFE)* provides practical guidance on appropriate infant and young child feeding in emergencies for policymakers, decision-makers and programmers working in emergency preparedness, response, and recovery across sectors and disciplines. The focus is on infants and young children aged 0-23 months and pregnant and lactating women. The OG-IFE is relevant across sectors and disciplines, particularly nutrition, but also health (including maternal and child health,

mental health and psychosocial support services), WASH, child protection, shelter, social protection, logistics, etc.

Read online here, and access other languages here.

Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide (2017)

Designed as a companion to the *Inter-Agency Field Manual on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings*, the *Newborn Health in Humanitarian Settings Field Guide* was originally published in 2015 and after some field testing was republished in 2018, with the ultimate goal of improving the survival and well-being of newborns in humanitarian settings. The intended use audience is health staff and field-level program managers from humanitarian and development agencies. The *Field Guide* focuses directly on the 'newborn' or 'neonatal' periods of life which are defined as the first 28 days after birth. 'Prematurity' refers to babies born before 37 weeks of gestation and 'extremely preterm' babies are born before 28 weeks of gestation.

Read online here, and access other languages here.

UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child (2018)

In response to a need for more concrete determination of what is the 'best interest of the child', UNHCR originally published the *Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child* in 2008 to operationalize the process of the best interests principle in the everyday work of humanitarian practitioners. After field testing, a 2018 revision and republication process created an updated guidance with more nuanced processes in place for temporary care, family reunification and unaccompanied children. The guidelines are aligned with a CRC definition of a 'child' (age 0–18 years).

Read online here.

UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) (2020)

The *UNICEF Core Commits for Children in Humanitarian Action* form UNICEF's primary policy and practice framework for humanitarian action. Issued by the executive director, they set out the commitment, principles, and benchmarks against which UNICEF holds itself accountable for the coverage, quality, and equity of its humanitarian action and are mandatory for all UNICEF personnel. The *CCCs* cover program and operational commitments and include interventions for nutrition, health, water and sanitation, HIV and AIDS, education and child protection. As of the completion of this report the 2010 version of the *CCCs* is available online and a new version is forthcoming. UNICEF defines 'early childhood' as the period of life from conception to school entry and delineates 'young children' as children between the ages of 0–8 years, or the age of school entry.

Read online here, and access other languages here.

UNICEF Operational Guidelines on Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings (2018)

The *UNICEF Operational Guidelines on Community-based MHPSS in Humanitarian Settings* were developed in response to emerging evidence on the determinants of children's resilience, lessons learned from the evaluation of existing approaches, and the unique challenges that today's crises pose for children's safety, wellbeing, and optimal development. These operational guidelines are designed and intended to help UNICEF staff and partners support and promote safe, nurturing environments for children's recovery, psychosocial wellbeing, and protection. They present an operational framework that emphasizes engaging actors at all levels (children, caregivers, families, and community service providers) to design and implement MHPSS strategies that are locally relevant, comprehensive, and sustainable in order to more effectively restore, strengthen, and mobilize family and community supports and systems with the ultimate goal of supporting child and family wellbeing in humanitarian settings.

Read online here.

Annex 2

Nurturing Care Framework domains and sub-categories

Domain	Sub-category	Definition
Good Health	**Maternal health**	Care for women from conception, during birth, and after birth; including family planning
	Care for children with developmental difficulties	Care for children who experience developmental difficulties
	Monitoring children's physical and emotional well-being	Mechanisms and programmatic elements designed to monitor children's' physical and mental well-being
	Newborn health and care	Caring for preterm babies; caregiver and health professional guidance on childcare in response to low birthweight and health challenges related to preterm delivery
	Preventative health services	Health interventions designed to prevent health emergencies, including immunization, deworming, screening, IMCI, etc.
	Care for sick children	Access to treatment and affected population- implementing organization communication regarding their rights and abilities to address illnesses in their children
Safety and Security	**Violence prevention**	Prevention of violence towards young children and their caregivers; capital punishment in classrooms and within families
	Birth registration and tracing	Registering of newborn children; tracing and tracking for children separated from their caregivers; reunification practices
	Clean and sustainable environment	Clean water and clean living spaces. Practices to reduce indoor and outdoor air pollution, physical and chemical hazards, etc.
	Safe family and play spaces	Safe and secure living, play and learning spaces for young children and their caregivers, free of violence
	Social care and social protection	Programmatic elements designed to support family and foster care over institutional care, cash or in-kind transfers and social insurance, social care services, etc.
Adequate Nutrition	**Breastfeeding and complementary feeding**	Support for appropriate breastfeeding and complementary feeding of children under-two years old
	Maternal nutrition	Care for pregnant women and new mothers
	Food security	Access to consistent and sufficient food and the ability to eat/use it
	Nutrition during illness	Nutritional considerations in response to child illnesses
	Nutrition monitoring and management	Mechanisms and programmatic elements designed to monitor and manage malnutrition, including micronutrient deficiencies, stunting, moderate and severe malnutrition, overweight and obesity
	Micronutrients and fortification	Programmatic elements aimed at ensuring micronutrient intake for children and their caregivers

Domain	Sub-category	Definition
Opportunities for Learning	**Caregiver support to provide learning opportunities**	Opportunities for caregivers to talk about their children's learning and to provide feedback on their children's education, as well as teacher-caregiver communication
	Good quality childcare and preschool	Quality of educational elements in childcare and preschool; structure, curricula, pedagogy, education supplies, etc.
	Engagement of adults and children	Programmatic elements designed to promote interaction between young children, caregivers, and older members of the community and between young children and other children of varying age
	Local language use	Use of local language in children's daily care, including classrooms, learning spaces, etc.
	Information, support, and counseling on learning opportunities	Support for caregivers to engage in early learning, including supporting access to books and toys (e.g. manufactured, homemade, or common household objects), simple games
Responsive Caregiving	**Play and communication between caregiver and child**	Programmatic elements focused on encouraging play between caregivers and their children
	Promoting caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness	Promoting caregiver response to child cues for play and health-related family support, including responsive feeding
	Involving fathers and extended family	Programmatic elements aimed at promoting fathers and extended family in childcare and childrearing
	Social and community support	Programmatic elements aimed at including mechanisms for community and wider cultural support for caregivers and young children
	Support for caregiver mental health	Programmatic elements intended to engage caregiver, support mothers' mental health, and provide psychosocial support

Annex 3

Methodological details

The following methodological description provides readers with insight into the qualitative methodology and how analytical decisions were made.

The universe of standards was chosen through consultation between the Moving Minds Alliance and the Humanitarian Collaborative research team. The Terms of Reference for this work provided 10 humanitarian standards and guidance documents. We separated these into two categories—standards and guidance documents—and added several additional resources to review. We did not include standards that were not specifically for humanitarian contexts. In the end, we reviewed 5 standards and 10 guidance documents.

Using NVivo, a qualitative coding software, the research team created a codebook for the 5 NCF domains and qualitatively coded the 15 sets of standards and guidance documents. The NCF domains were then broken down into sub-categories listed in Annex 2, and those sub-categories were then coded using the selected text from the original 5-domain coding process. For example, the text previously coded for "Opportunities for Learning" was then used as the source text for coding the varying sub-categories. This allowed the research team to focus their analysis and limit duplicitous coding processes. The sub-categories for each NCF domain were taken from a combination of Table 1 of the NCF where each component is defined and from the text of the NCF report. During the analysis, any duplicative codes were eliminated.

In the analysis of each NCF domain, we included only the standards that would reasonably be expected to include material about the domain. For example, the domain Safety and Security includes all 15 documents analyzed, while the domain Opportunities for Early Learning only includes 5.

MOVING MINDS
ALLIANCE