



## International Day of Education: Moving Minds Alliance and International Step by Step Association Urge Integrating Human Connection into AI-Driven Early Childhood Education Innovation in Humanitarian Settings

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On this International Day of Education, the Moving Minds Alliance (MMA) and the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) call upon governments, international organisations, NGOs, tech companies, and educational institutions to join forces in ensuring that AI-driven early childhood educational tools are developed and deployed with a focus on human connection, especially in humanitarian contexts. This year's theme, "**AI and Education: Preserving Human Agency in a World of Automation**," resonates deeply with our vision of a world where families caught up in crisis are able to rebuild resilience and foster the wellbeing and development of their young children.

Research shows that quality early childhood interventions can mitigate the adverse effects of trauma and provide a foundation for lifelong learning and well-being.<sup>1</sup> Early childhood is a pivotal period for cognitive, emotional, and social development. In humanitarian contexts, where children face compounded risks from displacement, conflict, and instability, the need for robust Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs is even more pressing. Investing in holistic education in humanitarian settings not only addresses academic needs but also the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of children, providing comprehensive support. Schools offer a safe space, protecting children from exploitation and violence, while promoting long-term development by equipping them with essential skills and knowledge.

As we navigate the rapid advancements in technology, it is crucial to ensure that these innovations serve to enhance, rather than replace, the essential human elements of learning and connection that children need to thrive. *AI offers many benefits such as enhanced delivery of essential services like healthcare, education, and emergency relief. For example, AI-driven chatbots provide personalised learning experiences to children in crisis-affected areas.<sup>2</sup> However, the use of AI in humanitarian settings raises significant concerns about data privacy and protection. Children's data can be misused, putting them at risk of exploitation and abuse.<sup>3</sup> It is crucial to implement these technologies responsibly to protect vulnerable children and ensure their rights are upheld.*

*Beyond concerns for data privacy, there is significant worry regarding screen time, which should be very limited for young children. Research indicates that excessive screen time can negatively impact the cognitive development of children under six years old, affecting memory, attention, and critical thinking skills. Additionally, it can hinder the development of empathy and social skills.<sup>4,5,6</sup>*

Moreso, Human connection is crucial for early childhood development, especially in humanitarian

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<sup>1</sup> [Evidence for Investment in New Research on Effective Early Childhood Development Programming in Humanitarian Settings](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The 'green shoots' of AI use in humanitarian action](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Not child's play: protecting children's data in humanitarian AI ecosystems](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Harvard | Screen time and the brain](#)

<sup>5</sup> [How Excessive Screen Time Affects Social Skills in Childhood](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Understanding and Mitigating the Effects and Impact of Screen Time on Children's Mental Health](#)

settings, as it provides emotional and psychological support, helping children feel safe and secure. Positive interactions with caregivers and peers stimulate cognitive development, essential for language acquisition and problem-solving skills. Additionally, human connection promotes better physical health, as emotionally connected caregivers ensure proper nutrition and healthcare. Strong relationships also build resilience, enabling children to cope better with adversities, and teach essential social skills like empathy and communication.

The need for multistakeholder collaboration in designing and deploying ECE programmes is even more crucial now as the situation of children living in humanitarian crises have worsened significantly in 2024:

- **Over 473 million children**—nearly 19% of the world's children—are living in conflict zones<sup>7</sup>
- **47.2 million children** have been displaced due to conflict and violence.<sup>8</sup>
- More than **52 million children** in conflict-affected countries are out of school.<sup>9</sup>

We therefore call upon governments, international organisations, NGOs, tech companies, and educational institutions to join forces to:

- Foster partnerships across sectors to develop and deploy AI-driven educational tools that are accessible, inclusive, and culturally relevant with a focus on human connection and encourage expansion of learning beyond the screen with support from adults.
- Ensure that the necessary technological infrastructure is in place to support AI initiatives, including reliable internet access and digital devices for all children.
- Establish robust frameworks to protect the privacy and security of children's data, ensuring that AI applications are used ethically and responsibly.
- Provide training and resources for educators to effectively integrate AI tools into their teaching practices, enhancing their ability to support students in diverse and challenging environments.
- Implement continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of AI in education, ensuring that it meets the needs of children and contributes to their holistic development.

By committing these actions, we can leverage AI to provide quality education to children in humanitarian settings, helping them to overcome the barriers they face and build a brighter future.

***Signed:***

Tricia Young, Director, Moving Minds Alliance (MMA)  
Liana Ghent, Director, International Step by Step Association (ISSA)

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## **About**

[Moving Minds Alliance](#) is a global advocacy impact alliance of 40 organisations collaborating to improve care and support for young children and their caregivers in emergencies, displacement, and crises. We work to scale up the financing, policies, and leadership needed to effectively support children 0-8 years in humanitarian settings.

[International Step by Step Association](#) is a leading international early childhood learning community and dynamic member association, powered by Europe's and Central Asia's foremost early childhood experts.

**CONTACT:** *Lola Ayanda, Communications Manager, Moving Minds Alliance* | [lola.ayanda@movingmindsalliance.org](mailto:lola.ayanda@movingmindsalliance.org)

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<sup>7</sup> [2024 'one of the worst years in history for children in conflict'](#)

<sup>8</sup> [2024: Devastating year for children in conflict zones](#)

<sup>9</sup> ['Not the new normal' – 2024 'one of the worst years in UNICEF's history' for children in conflict](#)