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Sector-wide analysis of early childhood development and education in emergencies in Colombia and considerations to strengthen systems globally

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Abstract
There is an urgent need to strengthen early childhood development and education in emergencies (ECDEiE) globally. Colombia has faced protracted and acute crises for decades. Also, the country has applied a unique approach to holistic and integrated ECDE policy formulation. We argue that these characteristics offer a valuable country-case to identify barriers and levers to the operationalization of ECDEiE. We applied a sector-wide analysis protocol that harmonized components of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and of a framework to characterize the governance of ECDE systems. The study outlines how the policy and program characteristics identified may represent levers or barriers to the effective operationalization of ECDEiE in Colombia. We discuss how these attributes could be considered in the trans-sectoral dialogue between ECDE and humanitarian actors with the aim of strengthening ECDEiE systems globally.

KEYWORDS
cross-sectoral responses, early childhood development and education in emergencies, ECDE governance, humanitarian emergencies, humanitarian programme cycle, policy formulation, sector-wide analysis

1 | INTRODUCTION

Over 86.7 million children under 7 years old have spent their entire lives in conflict zones (UNICEF, 2016). Moreover, as of 2019, nearly 25% of pre-primary-aged children lived in conflict-affected countries, and only one in three children residing in those countries were enrolled in pre-primary education (UNICEF, 2019a). Stress, extreme poverty, and other forms of early childhood adversity pose serious threats to the developmental trajectory of children (Black et al., 2017; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Humanitarian crises exacerbate children's exposure to these adversities, increase the risk of violence, exploitation and abuse, and disrupt family and community support systems (Ager, Blake, Stark, & Daniel, 2011; Boothby, Wessels & Strang, 2006; Murphy, Rodrigues, Costigan, & Annan, 2017; Toole & Waldman, 1997). Some of the most critical systems often disrupted in humanitarian crises are parental support and education. In crisis contexts, parents are critically important to the physical and psychosocial safety of children and may even become the children's educators when formal education and other Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) opportunities are inaccessible (Murphy et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2013). Lacking access to quality early education poses a significant risk to children's wellbeing, learning and developmental trajectories throughout the life course (Education Cannot Wait, 2016; European Commission, 2019).

Early childhood development opportunities include policies, services, programs, and interventions implemented prenatally through the first years of primary schooling (UNICEF, 2017). ECDE, more specifically, includes the educational, pedagogical, or instructional approaches for children and/or caregivers and communities of care within the wider early childhood development program agenda. In the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, education was elevated as a life-saving priority (Education Commission, 2016). However, there is a prevailing under-prioritization of general education in emergencies and of ECDE in emergencies (ECDEiE) in particular (Bessler, 2019; Bouchane, 2018; Miliband, Smith, & Murphy, 2018). Recent estimates indicate that the education sector receives less than 2% of global humanitarian funding, although some funding mechanisms have significantly increased investments in education in crises in the past 10 years (Education Cannot Wait, 2016; European Commission, 2019). A 2018 analysis reported that approximately half of active Refugee and Humanitarian Response Plans lacked explicitly documented early learning or education interventions within education sector responses (Bouchane, 2018). Eleven of 26 plans did not contain responsive caregiving-related interventions (Bouchane, 2018).

Prevailing crises require a whole-of-government, agency, and community response to ameliorate and protect caregivers and young children who are disproportionately impacted by crises (Martin, 2016). Part of that response includes guaranteeing the right to ECDE services, which are crucial to realizing other rights during crises, mitigating the short and long-term psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters, and ensuring children have the skills to thrive (Bensalah et al., 2000; Education Cannot Wait, 2016; UNICEF, 2016). Research and documented practices in emergencies have largely focused on primary- and secondary-level school-aged children. Historically there has been much less research on the quality or impact of providing early learning opportunities in emergencies (Kamel, 2006). There is an urgent need to understand how ECDE services and programs—foundational for ensuring children's equitable opportunities to survive and thrive cognitively, socially, and physically—are guaranteed across crisis contexts and sectors.

To begin addressing this knowledge gap, and to catalyze the dialogue of multisectoral (e.g., humanitarian, health, nutrition, education, social protection, social inclusion) stakeholders on this issue, we explored systems characteristics of ECDEiE in Colombia—

namely, policy frameworks and preparedness; strategic planning, data management, and coordination; programmatic approaches and implementation; resource mobilization and financing; and monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. The country offers a valuable case study for several reasons. First, Colombia has faced protracted and acute crises for decades, resulting in the emergence of adaptive and diverse humanitarian response systems. The 60-year old conflict has resulted in one of the highest numbers of internally displaced people in recent history with millions of persons around the country still affected (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2016; OCHA Services, 2019). Multiple massive displacements since 2016 have been reported as a result of ongoing confrontations among armed groups, as well as natural disasters primarily in rural and disperse areas (OCHA Services, 2019). Recent Peace Accords were expected to bring financial investments, in the long run, to close opportunity gaps especially in rural areas and territories most affected by the conflict. Furthermore, to date, Colombia has received around 32% of the close to 5 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees (Del Castillo et al., 2020). These estimates include heterogeneous migration profiles (e.g., refugees and migrants who permanently relocate to Colombia, are in transit, are pendular or are Colombians who have returned from Venezuela). Data suggest more recent refugees arriving in Colombia have poor health compounded with education and financial limitations (Castilla & Sørensen, 2019). A recent situational analysis on Venezuelan migration and early childhood provided an in-depth characterization of the demographic trends and institutional and community-level response in Colombia and offered pedagogical and strategic recommendations to inform programmatic approaches (Del Castillo et al., 2020). Our study aimed to characterize how systems to foster human, social, and economic development have evolved to cope with unprecedented humanitarian emergencies and highlight elements of those systems that need to be adapted.

Second, Colombia has formulated holistic national ECDE policy and governance frameworks and thus offers a unique model for coordinated ECD service implementation. To this end, Colombia is one of the first Latin American countries to enact a multisectoral National Law for Early Childhood called *From Zero to Forever* or *De Cero a Siempre* (DCAS). It has also institutionalized the Intersectoral Commission for Early Childhood or Comisión Inter-Sectorial para la Primera Infancia (CIPI) as the national coordinating body for early childhood. The country has also instated thematic and technical cross-sectoral groups for early childhood (or *Mesas*) to promote coordination at national and subnational (e.g., regional and municipal) levels (CIPI, 2013). The Route for Holistic Child Development offers operational guidelines to implement DCAS. A key goal of DCAS and the Route is to guarantee comprehensive, multi-domain, and differentiated services to address the individual needs of children either through integrated or highly coordinated systems to promote holistic development for all children (Yoshikawa et al., 2014). Multiple sectors are involved in the implementation of DCAS, with the social protection sector, primarily through the Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing or Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF), leading the operationalization of institutional, home-based, family-based, and community-based ECD modalities for children in vulnerable conditions. ICBF is the coordinating and operating agency of a larger National System of Family Wellbeing, which includes Ministries and national and local entities that contribute to multiple aspects of family and child wellbeing. The country also has enacted the National Childhood and Adolescence Policy, 2018–2030 which in recent years has strengthened normative frameworks around life-course approaches to development. Of note, in Colombia, ECDE traditionally includes services and modalities up until 6 years of age when children enroll into primary schools. Compared to other countries in the region, Colombia also has sociodemographic profiles which have implications for family support

systems at scale, such as a low proportion of children living with two parents (Clark et al., 2020).

Taken together, analyzing Colombia's humanitarian and ECDE landscapes offers important insights into what may be key levers and barriers to their effective and harmonized operationalization. A full and detailed institutional and program landscape analysis of the ECDE and humanitarian sectors of the country was beyond the scope of this study. Instead, our overarching aim was to strengthen the transdisciplinary dialogue between ECDE and humanitarian response sectors in the Latin America region and beyond. We also aimed to identify research priorities for developmental science based on the sector-wide analysis. To do this, we applied a three-pronged approach. One, informant interviews from geographically diverse areas were conducted to identify key characteristics of the ECDEiE sector. Two, a thematic analysis was performed to determine how those characteristics could represent either levers or barriers to the goal of equitable ECDEiE. Three, a set of considerations for the global humanitarian and ECDE sectors were extrapolated from the emergent findings.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Regional and key informant sampling

The study was conducted in the Capital District of Bogota and in the departments (referred to hereby as regions) of Norte de Santander and Antioquia. Three criteria were applied to select the territories: (1) high prevalence of internally displaced and/or Venezuelan families who have either settled or commonly transit through the region; (2) operational presence of government, private and/or international agencies; and (3) diversity of ECDE programs, services and interventions, such as those with different modalities, coverage, and institutional capacities. Key actors were invited to participate primarily from the national and subnational government (education, protection, and social inclusion sectors); humanitarian aid agencies and humanitarian response coordinating bodies; and civil society actors such as national and international non-government organization. The selection of informants was led by the UNICEF Country Office (see Table S1 in Supporting Information for a list of informants by region and level and Figure S1 in Supporting Information for a diagrammatic description of the study sample). Caregivers of children under 8 years of age, who were either internally displaced or had migrated from Venezuela, were invited to participate in focus group discussions. Groups ranged from 6 to 12 participants and were conducted separately according to place of origin (e.g., caregivers either internally displaced from within Colombia or coming from Venezuela). All interviews and focus groups were conducted between August and September of 2019.

2.2 | Data collection and analysis

We formulated a protocol that harmonized domains of the internationally recognized Humanitarian Programme Cycle domains and of a framework to characterize early childhood development governance previously applied in several low and middle income countries (Britto et al., 2014; IASC, 2015; Ponguta et al., 2019). The interview protocols were designed to address five domains: (1) policy frameworks and systems preparedness; (2) strategic planning, data management, and coordination; (3) programmatic approaches and implementation; (4) resource mobilization and financing; and (5) crosscutting

monitoring and evaluation as inputs to adaptive management strategies for policy and program implementation (Figure S2 in Supporting Information). Adaptive management refers to the use of data to inform the quality and efficiency of systems through continuous monitoring and the subsequent activation of strategies for their strengthening and improvement.

All interviews ($N = 55$) and focus group discussions ($N = 5$) were conducted in-person and in Spanish by members of the research team. Interviewers classified the responses into rubrics which corresponded to the protocol's key domains. The lead author reviewed all interview outputs and generated thematic summaries by informant group and governance level. Additionally, informants were asked to provide a statement on the strategies they believed would be effective in strengthening the ECDEiE response and relevant quotes were matched to emergent themes. Table S2 in Supporting Information contains the Spanish designation of policies, programs, and entities explored in the study that are referenced in the manuscript but not translated in-text for simplicity.

2.3 | Ethics

All protocols were reviewed by the study's Global Reference Group (namely, focal points from the Aga Khan Foundation, ChildFund International, the Global Education Cluster, the International Rescue Committee, the Open Society Foundations, Plan International, and Save the Children). The UNICEF Colombia Country Office supported the adaptation of the study protocol to be fit-for-purpose to the Colombia context. Participants were provided an informed consent form outlining procedures for confidentiality and risks and benefits of the study. All protocol, recruitment, and data collection and management procedures were approved by Yale University's Institutional Review Board (Protocol # 2000024970).

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Policy frameworks and systems preparedness

3.1.1 | United Nations Convention on the rights of the child

One of the most commonly reported attributes of the ECDEiE sector in Colombia was the critical role of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the country ratified in 1991. Respondents across governance levels and sectors noted that the Convention provided a normative anchor to the policy landscape, which in turn enabled the formulation of rights-based program approaches. As such, the role of the State in guaranteeing all children's rights are met—regardless of age or place of origin—emerged as a lever to equitable ECDEiE provision (e.g., services that reach all children regardless of gender, socioeconomic, geographic, or other characteristics). This was illustrated, for example, in a resolution that was enacted at the time of data collection which granted civil and birth registration to Colombian and Venezuelan children at risk of statelessness.[1] There was consensus among informants that, from a policy perspective, there was no distinction in the responses to address the need of Colombian or Venezuelan children in crises. One barrier mentioned with respect to the Child Rights anchor was the way in which ECDE is positioned in the Convention. One informant noted that there was a need to enhance the General Comment 7[2] within the public policy discourse to bolster the recognition of

young children as right holders and early childhood as a crucial time for the realization of all rights.

3.1.2 | National Law for early childhood (DCAS)

Informants from the government, private, and humanitarian aid sectors identified the pillar of "differentiated and holistic service provision," which is central to DCAS, as the key lever to address contextual, cultural, and sociodemographic characteristics of every child. According to informants, DCAS offered institutional guidelines to adjust pedagogical and operational processes to meet the diverse education, health, and protection needs of children and families. Several research and innovation efforts were mentioned as part of a targeted response to provide psychosocial support to children, service providers, and communities impacted by emergencies. Some of these efforts emerged from partnerships between the public, academic, and private sectors. One barrier most commonly identified with respect to the operationalization of DCAS in the context of ECDEiE was the heterogeneity with which holistic and differentiated services have been implemented across territories. For example, informants from municipal-level leadership and service providers noted that, despite some efforts, there was an unmet need to systematically and equitably provide technical support (e.g., coaching, access to materials, in-service training) to service providers to address the complex psychosocial needs that emerge as a result of conflict, displacement, and other emergencies. Although holistic service provision is a cornerstone of DCAS, disseminating and implementing operational guidelines to inform how best to access certain services (e.g., preventative health and housing) was noted as a challenge by some informants, particularly for the affected families coming from Venezuela. Despite the government's efforts to grant equitable service access, some caregivers of Venezuelan origin noted specific challenges to accessing preventative healthcare and navigating enrollment procedures to ECDE services (Table 1).

3.1.3 | The juncture between social and economic development policies and humanitarian response policies

Informants from the national and subnational government noted that because National, Departmental, and Municipal Development Plans (which guide social and economic investment portfolios) positioned migration and early childhood as distinct priority areas for investment, there was a key opportunity to leverage ECDEiE. They asserted these policies promoted investment among highly vulnerable communities, fostered local-level ownership and empowerment, and capitalized on the social and economic potential of communities. One of the possible barriers of this policy characteristic was the reliance on local-level leaders to prioritize, plan for, and operationalize both ECDE and humanitarian needs. Variance was reported at the municipal level with regard to the conceptualization and operationalization of the Development Plans that were implemented at the nexus of humanitarian emergencies, migration, and social and economic development provisions.

3.1.4 | Education and protection sector engagement

A policy characteristic that emerged was the engagement of the education and protection sectors in planning and implementing ECDEiE responses (such as through ICBF, Municipal Secretariats of Social Inclusion, and Municipal Secretariats of Education). According to

TABLE 1 Emergent themes from FGDs with affected population—Displaced and/or migrant parents/caregivers

Themes explored	Key finding	Representative quotes
Acculturation, perceptions of community cohesion	Perceptions of acceptance and relations between migrant and host communities varied from cooperative and united, to having experienced manifestations of rejection.	• "I have received help from other people" (CC, NS) • "Where I now live, we are united and protect each other to avoid crime" (CC, NS) • "We feel like the system and some people in Colombia has helped us" (VC, B) • "I do not feel like I have received the help I need, and I cannot integrate myself into the community" (VC, NS) • "I work selling things in the streets. It bothers me when I hear bad things about Venezuelans—many do not know what we have gone through. We want to be in Venezuela, we used to have everything we needed there" (VC, B) • "We like that they go hand in hand with other centers and that they invite children to celebrate being from Antioquia, they also involve Venezuelan parties, but we … parents … want to know the culture of Antioquia" (VC, A)
Major stressors with regard to child and family wellbeing	Job and economic insecurity are one of the top concerns, particularly for Venezuelan mothers. This extends to housing, food, and general insecurity.	• "In Venezuela I had everything, I was an accountant, but I cannot work here" (VC, B) • "The area where we live is very unsafe. It has been really hard for the children to live there" (VC, B) • "I would like to have my own home. It is frustrating having to find a different place to live" (CC, NS) • "The family is very crowded where we live now, but at least we have somewhere where we can sleep" (VC, NS) • "Having the legal permit to be in the country is what worries me the most in my daughter's life, now and in her future … to be sure she is secure later" (VC, A)
	Access to health services and work permits were highlighted as the key concern for Venezuelan mothers.	• "It has been difficult to get a work permit … and very difficult to access healthcare unless it is an emergency" (VC, B)
Enablers and challenges to accessing ECDE services	Modalities with flexible times and strategic locations facilitate the enrollment and participation.	• "The schedules in the center are flexible, and allows us to work while out child is safe" (VC, B) • "The most challenging thing about being a caregiver are the hours at work, I am a single mother, with three girls and I work in the clothing industry" (VC, A)
	For Venezuelan mothers, information and procedure on how to access ECDE programs for their children can be a challenge despite back to school campaigns. Social Inclusion services, such as community-support centers, have been a key entry point for displaced families.	• "My son was able to enroll in a Center for Child Development, but I had to beg the teachers to let him in to the program" (VC, NS) • "At the center, the children have all they need, they have taught him so much. My child says she wants to be like her teacher one day" (VC, B) • "It is difficult to go into the Mayors Office's webpage or talk to people from there about the work permit… and you start to find out and there are people who want to charge you money for it" (VC, A)

(Continues)

TABLE 1   (Continued)

Themes explored	Key finding	Representative quotes
Experience with the ECDE system	The experience of differentiated instruction is varied, with some Venezuelan mothers experiencing challenges with pedagogical approaches, particularly in pre-primary/transition.	• "We all learn differently—for my child who is in pre-primary it has been difficult to learn because he is not used to the way they teach in Colombia. I tell him to defend what he knows and his learning" (VC, B) • "I like that once a month we participate in meetings of coexistence agreements, and talk about, for example, punctuality, hygiene, and care habits … we have a picnic, we prepare food, etc., this helps us understand what my son tells me when he arrives at home about what he did at the center" (VC, A)
	Some caregivers appreciate the diversity of pedagogical approaches, holistic services and curricula offered in ECDEiE centers (i.e., nutrition, social and emotional learning).	• "The child does crafts, dames, music, learns about good habits, and receives food" (CC, NS) • "I take my child to the center because there he learns how to relate to other children and be nice" (CC, NS)
	Mothers who have participated in parent engagement and education were exposed to a wide variety of parental education and support content.	• "The programs are nice. We learn thing for ourselves and ways to deal with our children … they have night programs so that we can come after work" (CC, NS) • "There are activities every 15 days or every month. It is a parenting schools and the nutritionist and psychologist come" (VC, NS)

Abbreviations: A = Antioquia; B = Bogota; CC = Colombian Caregiver; NS = Norte de Santander; VC = Venezuelan Caregiver.

informants from the government sector, multisectoral engagement was a lever because it diversified the entry points for vulnerable families to access necessary services. The barriers to this approach included deficits in strategies to comprehensively (e.g., technically and financially) support frontline workers to meet children's early learning and development needs. Service providers and some municipal-level leaders mentioned that there was often an increased demand for existing ECDE services in areas that tend to be underfunded, and where displaced communities also commonly migrate or relocate to. Specifically, some of the increased demands included insufficient qualified and trained service providers or lack of funding to compensate additional service providers and offer quality and safe infrastructure.

3.1.5 | Emergence of national-level governance bodies to address specific humanitarian crises

The emergence of national-level governance bodies to address specific humanitarian crises was noted as a key policy lever. Specifically, a unit in the Office of the President (*Gerencia De Frontera*) was created to address the Venezuelan migration response. The predominant view was that, because of its national-convening power and operational capacities, having an entity operating proximally to the President's Office to address the national response was a lever for the humanitarian response sector. More research is needed to

characterize the challenges to coordinating national-level bodies and identify entry points to strengthen local-level data collection systems for strategic planning purposes, in the context of displaced children and families on the move.

3.2 | Strategic planning, data management, and coordination

3.2.1 | National systems for the identification and follow-up of children and families affected by crises

The convergence of national planning and national systems for early childhood monitoring to identify children and families affected by crises was done by capitalizing on ongoing efforts largely led by DCAS. For example, when Venezuelan children entered the ECDEiE system, such as enrolling in ICBF modalities, the information should automatically be part of a centralized registry. The CIPI has formulated a system to track the access of children to holistic and differentiated services (namely, the *Child by Child platform*). These data were designed to inform access and demand trends and were categorized as a lever since capitalizing on existing efforts may increase coordination and efficiency in planning. One of the main barriers to using these indicators to inform ECDEiE planning included lags in data transfer from local to central levels and variation in data collection and entry capacities. Another barrier was the complexity of integrating sector-specific data systems to inform the routes for holistic service provision. A related approach included developing instruments embedded in existing national systems to assess needs specific to humanitarian crises. These instruments included emergency response plans for rapid planning and programing during disasters. In contexts of acute crises, however, ECDE sector planning was largely conducted by entities that traditionally operate ECDE services among highly vulnerable communities (primarily ICBF) and a network of aid agencies. We did not identify an established comprehensive system to monitor specifically the quality of all ECDE modalities at scale, although there was mention of ongoing efforts to do so.

3.2.2 | Entities and bodies that concomitantly address ECDE and emergencies

In Colombia, the CIPI leads the sector in both normative and emergency settings. As such, existing governance and data transfer systems have evolved to absorb immigrant and humanitarian emergency processes for coordination purposes. These mechanisms included thematic groups or *Mesas* at the national and subnational levels that focused on issues pertaining to children and adolescents. Thematic groups or *Mesas* have also emerged to address specific issues concerning Venezuelan migrant children to facilitate the coordination between the international humanitarian aid bodies and the ICBF, both at the national and sub-national level. These mechanisms were mentioned by national and subnational government informants as levers because they allowed the ECDE sector to capitalize on and coordinate through existing multisectoral groups that are familiar with the local contexts. Some data collection mechanisms used by municipal secretariats and service providers have been adapted to include indicators specific to identify displaced and migrant children's education, health, and protection needs. However, the institutional capacity to meet the needs reportedly varied across territories and localities. The coordination among sectors, in particular to meet health-related needs for Venezuelan children, was reported as one operational barrier. This was despite several mechanisms enacted by the Colombian Government to enhance their access to multiple support services.

3.2.3 | Existing national systems that drive national preparedness and responses

Informants, primarily at the subnational government level, highlighted existing national emergency response systems as a relatively unexplored entry point for ECDEiE coordination. For example, the National Plan for Disaster Risk Management guides the country's 10-year emergency preparedness and response. The plan is drafted and led by a national unit which is coordinated from the President's Office through governors and mayors. As such, this system provides a mechanism for coordinated emergency preparedness and response. However, the plan provides strategies for disaster management within all educational settings. As it is currently framed, this limits the relevance and efficacy of this lever to inform support systems for early childhood.

3.2.4 | Complex network of international and national aid agencies

A complex network of international and national aid agencies was described as part of the strategic planning, data management, and coordination of humanitarian responses in Colombia. The Inter-agency Standing Committee Cluster is a mechanism aimed to promote quality and coordinated humanitarian responses internationally (IASC, 2015). Clusters grouped across sectors (i.e., education, nutrition, health, and protection) may be activated in a national context and are led by global cluster lead agency coordinators. In Colombia, a nationally active Education Cluster is co-led by the Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, and UNICEF. Additionally, issues specific to migration are largely coordinated through the Interagency Group of Mixed Migration Fluxes (GIFMM), co-led by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration. Our findings indicate that, in relation to early childhood, a main focus of the Education Cluster's operationalization has been ensuring children's access to formal preschool services and the promotion of school feeding programs in a joint effort between the Ministry of Education and the cluster's organizations. This emerged as a possible lever to discuss tailored-made responses to address specific needs of early childhood amid emergencies.

3.2.5 | Country clusters and GIFMM emerged as the key bodies for planning across humanitarian aid agencies

Although the mandates and operational mechanisms are distinct, some entities (government and aid agencies) may be part of both the GIFFM and Cluster system. Informants largely noted this represents a lever because in principle it should promote inter-sectorial planning and also a barrier because of risks of duplicating efforts by entities represented in multiple bodies. Furthermore, the issue was raised that the humanitarian response architecture described above should strengthen their response based on the comprehensive approach provided by DCAS. To this end, the intersectoral nature of DCAS would require that ECDEiE policies be considered across the cluster system landscape. With regard to the coordination, CIPI holds periodic coordination meetings with GIFMM and the cluster system. The Health Cluster and CIPI also work together to promote the inclusion of activities specific to prenatal and postnatal interventions, such as breastfeeding and nutrition. The engagement of the Colombian Government with GIFMM subgroups and the clusters has been led through multiple entities. For example, the Ministry of Education participates in education cluster subgroup processes and ICBF largely in protection cluster initiatives.

In terms of data management, the GIFFM largely utilizes the "R4V" report for its strategic planning, whereas the cluster is guided by their humanitarian dashboard, data which is reported in the Humanitarian Needs Overview. There has been a diversification of data collection systems for planning, including mobile teams that are needed to track people on the move, pendular, and other migrant communities. This diversification was identified as both a lever and a barrier. Diverse data collection and management mechanisms facilitate operations within agencies. However, we were not able to identify how these mechanisms informed each other and, more specifically, how the data were utilized and shared across sectors to inform adaptive management strategies to improve the efficiency and quality of ECDE in humanitarian contexts.

3.3 | Programmatic approaches and implementation

3.3.1 | Programs and services operationalized through the implementation of the Route for Holistic Child Development

The *Route for Holistic Child Development*, which provides operational guidelines for the implementation of DCAS, was identified as a lever because it cross-cuttingly addresses the different contexts and developmental needs of all young children, including those affected by displacement, disasters and/or forced migration. *Mesas*, or thematic and technical multisectoral groups at national and subnational levels, specifically informed policy and program responses on cultural, sociodemographic, and ethnic diversity issues. Contextualizing the pedagogical approaches of ECDE modalities was largely delegated to subnational and local leadership, as well as ICBF's prioritization of flexible, decentralized, and community-informed pedagogical planning. A key characteristic of the sector that was frequently mentioned by informants from the subnational level and service providers was the tension between providing very general guidelines for the provision of differentiated service by the national government vs. offering specific directives and support to inform programmatic content. Consistently, informants at the subnational level (including government as well as service providers) noted the need to better address cross-cultural and inter-ethnic issues in different ECDE service modalities generally, as well as more specifically for ECDEiE. Some efforts were mentioned at the local level in terms of how pedagogical plans, which drive the ECDE content in the different modalities, aimed to address acculturation and cross-cultural relations. However, there was a largely shared view that complex sociocultural issues, such as addressing xenophobia and multiculturalism in ECDE settings, required greater investment and support. This is of particular importance to the ECDE sector, as host and displaced families converge in ECDE settings. Caregivers who had participated in parental engagement and education initiatives were exposed to a wide variety of parent education content and support. However, some Venezuelan mothers mentioned it had been difficult to adapt to new cultural and pedagogical approaches to early learning (Table 1).

3.3.2 | Integration of displaced and migrant communities into community-based protection and support centers

Another programmatic category that emerged was one where displaced and migrant communities were fully integrated into community-based protection and support centers

which also offered childcare and ECDE services. In Bogota, for example, the Mayor's Office funded a network of community-based centers managed by the Social Inclusion Municipal Secretariat. This modality emerged as a lever for ECDEiE and a critical safety net for families and young children in humanitarian emergencies, including those coming from Venezuela. Caregivers who attended these centers accessed them for care, education, and nutrition support of their young children, as well as to receive general information on access to services and other types of family support. Caregivers in Bogota emphatically remarked on the crucial role these centers played in the safety, livelihood, and protection of their children and families. One mother noted: "*Having access to this center is the best thing that has happened to us and our young children…we only hope we can continue to come here*" (Venezuelan caregiver). These centers combined brigades to identify and address displaced and migrant families' homelessness. An overarching barrier associated with this approach was managing limited systems capacity and resources. Service providers, which in our sample included social workers in the community-based centers, remarked they were often faced with challenges to respond to individual needs and sociocultural differences among the families, with limited guidance on strategies to address interethnic integration. The perceptions of caregivers who were internally displaced or came from Venezuela ranged from feeling cooperation and unity, to having experienced harsh manifestations of rejection and xenophobia (Table 1).

3.3.3 | Multi-sectoral efforts in publicly funded programs

Publicly funded programs that addressed the specific care, education, nutrition, and protection needs of internally displaced, conflict-affected, and/or migrant communities, emerged as another programmatic category. These interventions and services were noted as levers because they were largely responsive to demographic changes (e.g., the influx of displaced communities) within the local settings, leading to a diversification in the ECDE programmatic landscape. These strategies included, for example, *My Protector Neighbour*, a pilot program by ICBF to support Venezuelan children and families, inclusive of but not specific to early childhood. Strategies also included a public campaign to specifically guide internally displaced children to reinstate their access to education in Bogota[3] and brief communications or circulares to inform municipalities of how to respond programmatically. Several of the circulares issued were related to access to ECDE modalities and preschool facilities. For example, within the education sector, the joint Circular 16 of 2018, issued by the Ministry of Education and Migration Colombia, established general approaches to care for children and adolescents from Venezuela in Colombian educational establishments. This Circular also established procedures for enrolling children into ECDE settings and schools, including making documentation requirements more flexible. Two barriers emerged with respect to these targeted approaches. First, subnational leaders aimed to balance the creation of programs that could unintentionally "single out" displaced and affected communities (which may lead to the stereotyping of groups) vs. the addressing needs that are unique to crisis-affected families. Second, there was varied awareness among stakeholders regarding the release and intent of some of the relevant guidelines and *circulares*. This suggests that the dissemination strategies of key programmatic tools pose an implementation challenge in the context of ECDEiE.

3.3.4 | Alignment between humanitarian aid agency interventions and national priorities

Interventions by humanitarian aid agencies aligned to varying degrees with national priorities and/or local needs. Some humanitarian relief agencies implemented targeted programs (e.g., UNICEF's Child Friendly Spaces) largely in response to influx of migrant communities. These responses represented levers for ECDEiE because they capitalized on different institutions' expertise, the expansion of flexible modalities, and supported the government in areas where there may be operational gaps. For example, *We Are Friends* was mentioned as one of the programs led by UNHCR to combat xenophobia and promote cohesion among host and migrant communities. The extent to which these programs effectively and systematically provide ECDE strategies and services as part of comprehensive crisis responses requires further exploration. However, the extent to which agencies effectively coordinated their efforts with national and/or subnational governments varied. Child Friendly Spaces, for example, have emerged to provide support to Venezuelan children and families and are implemented through partnerships between INGOs (e.g., World Vision) and community faith-based organizations, but this may not be the case with all programs. The sustainability and predictability of donor-driven programming emerged as a possible barrier to strategic planning for ECDEiE.

3.4 | Resource mobilization and financing

3.4.1 | Prioritization of ECDE via instruments for planning and financing

National and subnational-level instruments for planning and financing that prioritized ECDE increased the probability of earmarked services available to the sector. One of the challenges was ensuring that the budgets were "crisis-sensitive," with one consideration being that budget lines need to reflect migration flow projections to ensure young children's needs were met. Funds for ECDEiE were complemented in all cases by subnational-level fundraising. Some examples included municipalities that also sought partnerships with civil society or the private sector (e.g., through mechanisms of social responsibility). There was heterogeneity in the extent to which subnational governments established harmonized cooperation with the humanitarian aid sector, which is in line with the autonomy afforded to local levels to contextualize and adapt their responses. In some cases, to increase access to ECDE services for crisis-affected populations such as those displaced or migrating, costs were covered by the mayoralties, through the protection and inclusion sectors, or by including ECDE in Municipal Emergency Management Plans.

3.4.2 | Focalized strategies for municipalities most affected by the armed conflict

The National Government prioritized social and economic investments in municipalities affected by Armed Conflict, known as *Development Programs with a Regional Focus*. Informants from the subnational government level noted this has resulted in an opportunity for increased investments in the ECDE sector in target areas, particularly in municipalities where the sector is prioritized by the local government. This targeted social programming approach enabled concentrating efforts where support was most needed,

representing a lever to ECDEiE. The exploration of how funding needs were met beyond the target municipalities was beyond the scope of this study. Further research is needed to determine sustainable and equitable funding schemes to meet the needs of migrant and mobile communities.

3.4.3 | Related funding and research mechanisms that have emerged from the Peace Accords

As a result of the Peace Accords, a funding mechanism (the *Colombia in Peace Fund)* was enacted to contribute to the recovery of targeted areas that were most impacted by the armed conflict. However, according to a 2019 report,[4] only around 1.6% of the total budget of the *Fund* was assigned to the early childhood subaccount. As part of research and innovation efforts, some initiatives supporting peacebuilding through early childhood have also been funded in Colombia (e.g., Resilience and Reconciliation Program by Fundación Saldarriaga Concha). These emergent funding mechanisms represent possible levers for ECDEiE.

3.4.4 | Increase in aid funding

Lastly, Colombia's ECDEiE sector has seen an increase in funding streams from aid agencies since the onset of the Venezuelan crisis. Mechanisms like Education Cannot Wait have emerged as opportunities to support education in emergencies overall. The extent to which ECDE interventions are taken into consideration utilizing ECW funding in the Colombia context requires further research. The allocation of funds across the agencies largely followed institutional mandates, which in general were centrally or globally determined institutional priorities. In some cases, however, participatory needs assessments informed the funding decisions of some aid agencies. Some informants from the international aid sector noted that prioritizing ECDE was dependent on the extent to which national and subnational governments prioritized ECDE in their own national and subnational planning.

3.5 | Consensus statements

We asked all informants to state the most significant factor(s) to effectively strengthen ECDEiE in the global context. Six thematic categories emerged from 60 statements coded. Table S3 in Supporting Information presents a summary of the categories, subcategories, and examples of statements and operational definitions. The most frequent category included importance of strengthening advocacy and knowledge brokering such as strategies to increase the effectiveness of current advocacy efforts, enhancing evidence generation and brokering mechanisms, and prioritizing ECDEiE within humanitarian aid sector mandates. The second most frequently mentioned category included the importance of increasing capital and recurrent investments in the sector to expand equitable access. Informants also stated alignment with international rights and development frameworks, as well as national policy provisions, were entry points for sector-wide strengthening. A fourth emergent category included greater efforts in family engagement, community, and civil society sensitization and mobilization for ECDEiE services to reach the most vulnerable children and families. Increased coordination, data collection, and information management mechanisms were also identified as priority areas for sector-wide strengthening.

4 | CONCLUSIONS AND EMERGING QUESTIONS FOR THE ECDE AND HUMANITARIAN TRANS-SECTORAL DIALOGUE

4.1 | Rights frameworks that underlie the ECDE and humanitarian policy vision

Child and human rights frameworks enable responses anchored in the realization of *all* children's rights. For this policy characteristic to be leveraged for ECDEiE, however, stakeholders need to consider if ECDE is well positioned in the public policy discourse across levels of governance. Stakeholders need to also identify if and how effective advocacy mechanisms can be operationalized to bolster the recognition of young children as right holders and early childhood as a crucial time for the realization of all rights.

4.2 | National ECDE policy anchors designed to drive differentiated and comprehensive service provision

ECDE policies designed to drive differentiated and comprehensive service provision in culturally and socio-demographically diverse communities are meaningful levers for the sector. These policy anchors offer a cross-cutting framework and diversity in institutional approaches to respond to multiple contexts, including as part of humanitarian responses. A key consideration of this attribute is the extent to which ECDE policy provisions are cross-cutting, equitable, and crisis-sensitive. It is paramount to consider the extent to which policies equitably address the unique needs of children and families affected by crises without singling them out or failing to foster their autonomy, agency, and potential.

4.3 | Economic and social policies that include ECDE and are responsive to crises

Economic and social development policies that enable sustainable investments and capitalize on the potential of communities experiencing crises are crucial enablers. These policy characteristics must consider to what extent and how effectively policies integrate the human capital of families and how they connect child development as a conduit to national development. It is also important to consider the institutional capacity of local governance to both frame and equitably operationalize those policies, particularly in a crisis-sensitive manner.

4.4 | Multisectoral responses and protective environments for young children and families

Multisectoral responses, such as those that diversify policy implementation through the engagement of the education and child and social protection sectors, offer service delivery entry points and can effectively integrate family supports and safe environments for young children. Coordination across these sectors requires specific considerations, strategies, and interventions geared towards equitably reaching and providing targeted interventions for young children and their caregivers. These can be part of a comprehensive continuum of holistic services and programs provided across sectors and across a child's life course. To this end, recent convenings on coordination between education and child protection

in humanitarian action suggest coordination "should not be viewed as the goal but as a means to achieving the common goal of healthy child development" (INEE & The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2018, p. 10).

4.5 | National-level governance bodies offer response coordination across sectors and systems levels

National-level governance bodies created to address emergent crises offer far-reaching mechanisms for a coordinated response. However, the emergence of national bodies has to concomitantly consider investments in subnational local data collection, information management, and capacity building on crisis-sensitive planning. Such investments should in turn consider including stakeholders at subnational and local levels responsible for planning, management, budgeting and those charged with implementation particularly in decentralized contexts (Ponguta et al., 2019).

4.6 | Coordinated normative and humanitarian data systems

From strategic planning, data management, and coordination perspectives, the Colombia country-case suggests that capitalizing on ongoing efforts to integrate national data systems (education, protection and health) for early childhood in normative contexts and as part of humanitarian responses may increase strategic planning efficiencies. Relatedly, national and subnational ECDE coordinating and information management mechanisms should be adaptive (or be used to inform increased efficiency) and be aligned with humanitarian emergency processes. This includes the annual humanitarian programme cycle calendar adhered to by the humanitarian sector (IASC, 2015). The extent to which these efforts effectively bolster the ECDEiE sector is dependent on both the local institutional capacities for local-level coordination across sectors, data collection, and information management; vertical coordination between local, regional and national bodies; and national horizontal coordination between national inter-ministerial and humanitarian bodies (e.g., clusters across sectors and the GIFFM). In Colombia, for example, a more in-depth analysis of how agencies such as the GIFFM and the National System of Family Wellbeing position their institutional missions and are coordinated is needed (Del Castillo et al., 2020).

4.7 | Coordinated and strategic advocacy efforts

Multiple humanitarian aid planning, coordination, and capacity building mechanisms for humanitarian actors may exist and converge in a national setting, which may increase the coverage of aid presence while also leading to a possible duplication. Importantly, stakeholders must consider where ECDE is positioned well and clearly within the priorities of humanitarian aid and development agencies at the national, regional, and international levels, across relevant sectors and coordinating bodies. In recent years, for example, pre-primary education has been more prominently featured in strategies of multilateral institutions, such as UNICEF's 2019–2030 Strategy and UNHCR's Refugee Education Strategy (UNHCR, 2019; UNICEF, 2019b). In the humanitarian sector specifically, there is emerging global momentum to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the humanitarian response, such as through cluster-specific strategic plan's capacity objectives, strategic plans of inter-agency bodies, or strategies and operational plans of humanitarian aid agencies (Child

Protection Area of Responsibility, n.d.; Global Education Cluster, 2017; INEE, 2018). In the future, it will be important to understand to what extent pre-primary education aims are enacted in humanitarian settings; how these strategies contribute to global ECDE goals; and to what extent they play a part in influencing ECDEiE service provision in partnership with national governments.

4.8 | Program responses anchored in cultural, sociodemographic, and ethnic diversity

Our analysis of the programmatic approaches in Colombia revealed a diverse typology for ECDEiE. The country's history of differentiated and comprehensive program provision offers lessons into program responses that are anchored in cultural, sociodemographic, and ethnic diversity. The full integration of displaced and migrant communities into community-based protection and support centers offers an aid paradigm anchored in principles of social inclusion and economic and social development. This programmatic diversification is crucial to increasing access and equitable ECDEiE provision (Dowd, Pisani, & Hsiao, 2018). However, our findings were consistent with a recent situational analysis of Venezuelan children in Colombia which highlighted the need for greater investment in psychosocial, socioemotional, and holistic support for young children in crises (Del Castillo et al., 2020).

4.9 | Resource mobilization and financing

Lastly, from a resource mobilization and financing perspective, key levers were identified. The first lever pertains to the national and subnational-level mechanisms which account for earmarked ECDE funding across education, health, child protection, social protection, and nutrition sectors. Two, prioritizing social and economic strategies in territories or areas most affected by crisis is also fundamental to equitable ECDE responses, as is ensuring the sector is funded through mechanisms that often emerge to address a humanitarian crisis and/or long-term reconstruction and recovery. Three, the inclusion of early childhood as a central issue in the peacebuilding portfolio is an area that holds great promise. Recent analyses on peacebuilding conceptualize the linkages for this cross-sectoral programmatic agenda (Ponguta et al., 2018). Influencing institutional missions and financing mechanisms to prioritize ECDE and, in turn, operationalizing systems that effectively capitalize on evidence-based systems levers will be crucial in Colombia and globally.

4.10 | Limitations

Our study had several limitations. A country as culturally and socially diverse as Colombia requires an ample geographic sample for the exploration of local systems capacity. Furthermore, in Colombia, ECDE traditionally includes services and modalities up until 6 years of age when children enroll into primary schools. This study primarily focused on the 0–5 age range. It is necessary to explore the institutional and pedagogical implications more specifically during the transition year and into primary schooling. Our conceptual framework suggests continuous monitoring and evaluation are paramount to the adaptive management capacity of both the ECDE and humanitarian aid systems. There are several monitoring efforts used to evaluate different components of national policies and aid strategies

(Ponguta et al., 2019). More research is needed to determine the extent to which Colombia has developed indicators and systems that allow the integration and coordination of ECDEiE, allowing monitoring and adaptive management across sectors.

In terms of the IASC system, this study focused primarily on the education cluster as an entry point to the systems-level analysis. Due to the intersectoral nature of ECD the health, nutrition, and protection clusters also play a key role in the response. Relatedly, our study identified convening spaces to promote the coordination between CIPI and humanitarian response bodies (in particular GIFMM and the humanitarian cluster system). We identified this inter-institutional juncture as a critical one to effective coordination of the ECDEiE sector. A targeted characterization of those processes would provide more granular information on bottlenecks to effective coordination.

4.11 | Implications for research

Taken together, these limitations and the overall findings shed light on research priorities for the developmental science community. We offer future areas of research to address key evidence gaps and needs identified in our study: (1) designing, implementing and communicating research anchored in rights approaches and that effectively position ECDE as a fundamental programming area in humanitarian responses; (2) exploring implementation and impact evaluation methods that address ECDEiE in context-relevant ways; (3) applying community-led and participatory approaches to research that capitalize on the assets and strengths of families and children in crises; (4) investing in and strengthening research agendas that promote integration and cohesion in early childhood among communities experiencing forced displacement and migration; and (5) investing in the development, application and validation of indicators, measures, and data systems to assess ECDE outcomes in humanitarian emergencies and improve accessibility to such data to improve quality and service provision.

Finally, our study was conducted before the COVID-19 outbreak. The impact that this global crisis has had across sectors and communities is unprecedented and requires system-wide mitigation strategies to address a plethora of emergent needs (Yoshikawa et al., 2020). A new generation of policy, program, and research responses will undoubtedly surge as the thread of the pandemic poses challenges to all sectors and to the existing coordination and implementation mechanisms for ECDEiE globally.

NOTES

[1] The Resolution No. 8470 was issued in August 2019 and can be accessed here: http://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/jdownloads/Resoluciones/Resoluciones%20-%202019/RESOLUCION%208470%20(3).pdf

[2] The General Comment 7 was drafted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to outline the implications of the CRC specifically for young children: https://www.refworld.org/docid/460bc5a62.html

[3] *Francisca de Star Navigator* or *Francisca la Navegante de Estrellas* was one of the flagship programs by the Mayor's Office in Bogota that offered a specific route and informational resources for vulnerable and displaced families to access care and education services.

[4] Report provided by study informant: Weekly Report No. 68, July 22–26th on resource assignments and expenditures of the Colombia in Peace Fund.

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Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.