

Editorial Introduction:**War, Displacement, and the Urgency of Early Childhood Response****Prof. Svetlana Chachashvili-Bolotin**

Head of the Institute for Immigration and Social Integration
Ruppin Academic Center

Dr. Yan Serdtse

Head of Research, Early Starters

Yulie Khromchenco

VP of Emergency and Development and Eastern Europe Operations,
Early Starters

Ran Cohen Harounoff

Co-Founder, CEO, Early Starters



War and forced displacement have become defining experiences of our time, disrupting the lives of tens of millions across the globe. These crises fracture families, dismantle communities, and strain entire social systems—but their most profound and lasting effects are often borne by the youngest among us. While humanitarian responses typically prioritize basic needs such as food, shelter, and physical safety, the specific developmental needs of young children—whose wellbeing depends on stable relationships, secure environments, and consistent care—remain critically under-addressed.

This special issue of *Migration Journal* examines the centrality of early childhood in the broader dynamics of war and migration. It emerged from the international online conference "*Early Childhood in Times of War*", held in April 2024, co-organized by the Institute for Immigration and Social Integration at the Ruppin Academic Center and Early Starters International. The conference brought together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from fields including education, therapy, health, and community-building, to reflect on how to best support young children in times of crisis.

The articles presented here reflect the conference's core aim: to bridge research and practice in service of children. The issue includes a combination of empirical research and practice-based reflections—some geared toward academic audiences, others toward field practitioners and policymakers—offering tools, frameworks, and insights for those working on the frontlines of displacement. Drawing from experiences in three major crisis zones—the war in Ukraine, the war

in Israel following the October 7 attacks, and the refugee crisis in New York—the contributions illuminate both universal vulnerabilities and the need for localized, culturally responsive solutions.

War and Migration: What About the Children?

The impact of armed conflicts on children around the world reached devastating and likely record levels in 2024, according to a review by UNICEF of the latest available data and prevailing global trends. While adults confront the challenges of survival and adaptation, young children—especially those in early developmental stages—grapple with losses they may not even yet be able to name. The collapse of routines, exposure to violence, and separation from caregivers can leave emotional, cognitive, and relational scars that shape entire lifetimes.

Despite increased recognition of children’s rights in international frameworks, the practical reality in most crisis zones remains grim. Displacement frequently results in delayed learning, emotional suffering, intergenerational trauma, and critical gaps in care. And while nearly every aspect of adult life can eventually resume or be rebuilt, early childhood cannot be paused or postponed.

A Call for Integration: Why Early Childhood Must Be a Priority

This issue urges a paradigm shift in humanitarian aid. Rather than treating early childhood as an ancillary concern, we argue it must be seen as foundational to community resilience, recovery, and long-term social reconstruction. Several key components emerge from the contributions:

- Strengthening families as caregivers – Parents and extended kin are often the first and most enduring sources of emotional safety. Interventions that support them can significantly buffer the impacts of trauma on children.
- Engaging local communities – In most cases, locally rooted practices and community networks tend to be more trusted, contextually relevant, and sustainable than externally imposed interventions. However, this is not universally the case and often depends on the strength and capacity of the local structures.
- Ensuring continuity beyond the emergency – Responses must evolve from short-term relief to long-term systems that support education, healing, and consistent developmental care.
- Prioritizing mental health and psychosocial support – Healing must address the inner lives of children and caregivers, not only their material conditions. Recognizing children as active participants in their own recovery is essential for meaningful and effective support.

Learning from Practice: Local Adaptation and Professional Collaboration

Each case study in this issue affirms a simple truth: there is no universal solution. Effective support must be both locally anchored and professionally guided. Yet, this integration is not without

challenges. In some contexts, tensions may arise between local practices—which can at times reflect harmful or overly traditional norms—and universal therapeutic standards. Professionals may struggle to respect cultural specificity while adhering to ethical and evidence-based approaches. From therapeutic interventions for internally displaced families in Israel, to community-based strategies in New York, to educator recruitment and resilience training in emergency shelters—these contributions demonstrate not only how global developmental principles can be adapted into meaningful local practices, but also the importance of navigating and mediating between differing perspectives on what constitutes appropriate and just care.

What's Inside: A Preview

- “Reintegration into Life After Captivity” – Carmit Katz and Ma’ayan Jacobson. Outlines a hybrid training model for professionals working with children released from captivity, blending trauma-informed care with insights drawn from the field.
- “Addressing the ‘Migrant Crisis’ in New York City” – Nathaniel Kratz, John Valencia, Tenesia Richards, and Dodi Meyer. Presents a case study of NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital’s community-based response to the influx of migrants, emphasizing healthcare, legal aid, and safe spaces for children.
- “In the Eye of the Storm: Human Resource Practices for Educators in Times of Crisis” – Maya Wizel. Explores strategies for recruiting, training, and retaining educators in crisis contexts, based on field research from Israeli evacuation shelters after October 7.
- “Will We Ever Return Home?: Women Fleeing with Their Children from War” – Alice Gaya. Investigates the migration experiences of Israeli women who fled to Greece with their children, introducing the notion of “privileged refugees” within the discourse of displacement.
- “From War to War: New Immigrants (Olim) in the ‘Iron Swords’ War” – Ravit Talmi-Cohn and Svetlana Chachashvili-Bolotin. Examines the situation of immigrants who escaped war in their origin countries and encountered another war in Israel, drawing attention to challenges in integration and policy response.
- “Training Staff to Support Early Age Children During Crisis: Adapting Global Principles into Local Realities” – Yan Serdtse and Yulie Khromchenko. Presents a scalable, trauma-informed training model for early childhood professionals, rooted in Israeli expertise and adapted for diverse international crisis settings.
- “Leveraging Past Research and Experience for Internally Displaced Families in Israel Following October 7” – Yan Serdtse and Miriam Shapira. Proposes therapeutic interventions for families displaced by the October 2023 attacks, emphasizing psychosocial resilience and family-centered care based on prior field experience.

Looking Ahead

At a moment when global displacement is only increasing, prioritizing early childhood is not optional — it is essential. This special issue calls upon governments, humanitarian actors, funders, and communities to:

- Recognize early childhood as a critical axis of humanitarian response
- Invest in family- and community-centered systems of care
- Build sustainable frameworks that extend beyond the emergency phase
- Cultivate collaboration between academic research and applied fieldwork

We hope this issue inspires new partnerships and a deeper commitment to protecting the youngest among us. In doing so, we are not only responding to the crises of today—but helping lay the foundations for tomorrow’s recovery, belonging, and hope.

Wishing peace for all of us,

The Editors