

Two Generation Initiative

Catalyzing Research, Policy, and Practice to Improve Outcomes for Young Children and their Caregivers

Across low- and middle-income countries, nearly half of all children under the age of five are at risk for not reaching their developmental potential.¹ Risk factors such as exposure to poverty and adverse childhood experiences often co-occur and can interfere with children's development, leading to long term negative consequences for education, health, wellbeing, and economic opportunity.² Early disadvantage is also associated with later high fertility and poor care for children, additionally contributing to the intergenerational transmission of poverty.³

The effects of early childhood intervention are often positive and with favorable benefit-cost ratios. However, positive effects are typically small to medium in magnitude and are therefore unlikely to result in the type of breakthrough impact that will meaningfully transform the lives of children, particularly those affected by the most severe adversity.⁴ New approaches and innovation are needed.

One of the most important protective factors for children zero to five years old in mitigating the effects of severe adversity is a positive, responsive relationship with a parent, but existing intervention typically targets either adults or children. Interventions that target both children and their caregivers could lead to greater and more lasting impact than interventions targeting just one of these two groups. Two generation theory for early childhood development advocates for this type of innovation across policy, practice, and research.⁵

¹ Black, M. M., Walker, S. P., Fernald, L. C., Andersen, C. T., DiGirolamo, A. M., Lu, C., ... & Lancet Early Childhood Development Series Steering Committee. (2017). Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course. *The Lancet*, 389(10064), 77-90.

² Engle, P. L., Black, M. M., Behrman, J. R., De Mello, M. C., Gertler, P. J., Kapiriri, L., ... & International Child Development Steering Group. (2007). Strategies to avoid the loss of developmental potential in more than 200 million children in the developing world. *The Lancet*, 369(9557), 229-242.

³ Grantham-McGregor, S., Cheung, Y. B., Cueto, S., Glewwe, P., Richter, L., Strupp, B., & International Child Development Steering Group. (2007). Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries. *The Lancet*, 369(9555), 60-70.

⁴ Shonkoff JP, Fisher PA. Rethinking evidence-based practice and two-generation programs to create the future of early childhood policy. *Dev Psychopathol.* 2013 Nov;25(4 Pt 2):1635-53. doi: 10.1017/S0954579413000813. PMID: 24342860; PMCID: PMC4745587.

⁵ Shonkoff JP, Fisher PA. Rethinking evidence-based practice and two-generation programs to create the future of early childhood policy. *Dev Psychopathol.* 2013 Nov;25(4 Pt 2):1635-53. doi: 10.1017/S0954579413000813. PMID: 24342860; PMCID: PMC4745587.

IPA is launching a Two Generation Initiative to explore how two generation theory might be applied to diverse, global settings and how it can be operationalized through different approaches to intervention and policy. Ultimately the goal will be to catalyze greater attention and investment in two generation approaches across a range of sectors, and to use rigorous research to identify the most effective strategies for improving outcomes for children and their caregivers in contexts of severe adversity.

Recognizing that two generation theory is most relevant for the most vulnerable, the initiative includes a focus on populations affected by forced displacement. At the end of 2021, UNHCR reported that there were a record 89.3 million people forcibly displaced as a result of conflict, persecution, human rights violations, or generalized violence.⁶ Young children are overrepresented among the population of forcibly displaced and experience displacement during a critical time in their development, when they are particularly sensitive to environmental influence and highly dependent on their caregivers.

Beginning initially in Uganda and Colombia, two of the world's top hosting countries for refugees, asylum seekers, and other people needing international protection,⁷ IPA will work with government, humanitarian, and development partners to investigate how an intergenerational perspective can be integrated into policy, programming, and research. These partnerships will aim to address the lack of evidence-based interventions that explicitly target caregivers, children, and their interaction. Uganda and Colombia offer promising environments for two generation policy and practice for communities affected by forced displacement. Although implementation challenges exist, legislation and policies in Uganda and Colombia have enabled various forcibly displaced populations to access national social services, education, work, and freedom of movement.

Together with our partners, IPA will undertake four initial strategic activities that aim to contribute to future program design, policy development, and investment for children (0-5) and their caregivers affected by displacement. These activities are described below.

Policy and Practice Needs Assessment

This activity will answer key strategic questions such as, 'What do key decision makers in policy and practice believe are the needs, opportunities, and unanswered questions in relation to the children and parents they serve? What outcomes do decision makers believe are the most important to prioritize for young children and parents?' And what issues and factors affecting refugee and host communities need further exploration?

⁶ UNHCR, Global Trends Report <https://www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021>

⁷ UNHCR, Refugee Statistics, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

Co-creation of a Two Generation Policy and Research Agenda

Together with our partners, we will develop a policy, practice, and research agenda to inform future program design, policy development, and investment for displaced children (0-5) and their parents.

Initial Research Activities

The initiative will conduct initial small scale research activities to meaningfully move the field forward and help lay a foundation for future work. At a later stage, the goal will be to conduct larger scale research projects informed by the co-created two generation policy and research agenda. Based on findings from the needs assessment, we will also develop policy and practice relevant evidence reviews responsive to interests, needs, and key questions.

Equipping Decision-makers by Synthesizing and Disseminating Evidence

Throughout the initiative we will continually share research and evidence with stakeholders. In addition, IPA will follow up on the policy agenda by synthesizing and sharing relevant evidence with policymakers and practitioners to lay the groundwork for influencing the policies and practices identified as being able to benefit from an evidence-based two-generation approach in later stages of the Initiative.

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