



ANNUAL REPORT 2025



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WAY FORWARD



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the reporting period from January 2025 to December 2025, the Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC) – an initiative of Rupani Foundation, continued to strengthen its role as the leading national platform for advancing holistic, and multisectoral Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Pakistan through advocacy, knowledge exchange, capacity-building, awareness raising, membership drive and strategic partnerships with the government, UN agencies and private sector.

During the reporting period PAFEC played a strong capacity-building and technical support role through sustained collaboration with government institutions and development partners. Key efforts included a three-day training at District Hospital Haripur, organized by the Ministry of National Health Services & Coordination (MoNHS&C), the National Health Services Academy(NHSA), and UNICEF; a two-day training in Islamabad for frontline health workers on the Optimizing Parenting Package for ECD, organized by the SUN Secretariat and UNICEF; a two-day training for the Sindh Institute of Child Health and Neonatology (SICH&N) Karachi, organized by UNICEF in collaboration with the Sindh Health Department, a two-day training for the staff and leadership of the Benazir Income Support Programme(BISP) facilitation centers across the country and a two-day training for the staff of Akbar Kare, Peshawar – An Institute catering children with disabilities. These trainings focused on core ECD concepts, early brain development and neuroscience, the Nurturing Care Framework, operationalization of ECD interventions, and the effective implementation of Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation (MMS).

As part of its advocacy and knowledge-sharing efforts, PAFEC actively participated in major national and international forums, including the 15th International Public Health Conference (where Ms. Khadija Khan, CEO, PAFEC co-chaired the scientific session on parenting), and convened a deliberation with technical experts on the implementation of ECD Framework in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives(MoPD&Sis), Rupani Foundation, UNICEF and Allama Iqbal Open University(AIOU). As a technical partner of UNICEF, PAFEC also participated in the Regional Online Meeting on ECD in South Asia, reinforcing its national and regional leadership role.

Other key programme achievements during the year included the successful completion of the 5th Online Certification Course in ECD; continuation of the ECD Podcast Series launched with Ibex Media Network in May 2023; and initiation of a new podcast series in collaboration with UNICEF and Ibex Media Network, focusing on nurturing care and positive parenting.

PAFEC also organized two key events on Caregivers' Mental Health and its Impact on Child Development under the umbrella of the Think Tank formed in 2024. In addition, the ECD Webinar Series 2025 was launched, with seven episodes conducted to date, alongside continued preparations for the 5th International Conference on ECD. Through the ECD Webinar Series 2025, and Podcast series, PAFEC created a national virtual platform connecting policymakers, professionals, practitioners, and caregivers to promote evidence-based practices in nurturing care, positive parenting, child health, nutrition, early learning, protection, and well-being.

Looking ahead, PAFEC advanced strategic planning and partnerships, including continued preparations for the 5th International Conference on ECD, submissions to UNICEF and other donors' Call for Expressions of Interest for Scaling ECD, development of a joint project with Allama Iqbal Open University for the Parenting Programme, participation in the ECDAN Short Course Consortium, and planned collaboration with NCRC, HEC, and UNICEF and continuation of online certificate course and podcast series. Collectively, these efforts reflect PAFEC's sustained commitment to scaling impact, strengthening systems, and promoting nurturing care and positive parenting for holistic child development across Pakistan.

Khadija Khan

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Khadija Khan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Khadija" on the top line and "Khan" on the bottom line.

CEO PAFEC



ABOUT PAFEC - AN INITIATIVE OF RUPANI FOUNDATION

Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC) is a national alliance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) stakeholders in Pakistan. PAFEC is registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), under section 42 of the Companies Act, 2017. The Alliance is governed by a high-profile Board of Directors which includes serving and retired government officials, representatives of civil society organisations, and academia, who are making a difference in the field of early childhood development, education, health, nutrition, child protection, and community development. The Alliance's secretariat is in Islamabad.

With a strong and growing membership base of over 200 institutional members and 1,000+ individual members nationwide, PAFEC serves as a unifying platform for practitioners, policymakers, academics, civil society organisations, and development partners working in the ECD sector. As part of its international engagement, PAFEC is an institutional member of global and regional networks, including the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN) and the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC). Through these affiliations, PAFEC contributes to regional and global dialogue while bringing international best practices and learning to the national context.





STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Stronger ties, stronger outcomes for Early Childhood Development

In 2025, PAFEC strengthened the ECD sector through strategic collaborations with partners, institutional and individual members, and expert resource persons, including government ministries, academic institutions, and development organisations such as the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, SUN Secretariat, UNICEF, Allama Iqbal Open University, Akbar Kare Institute, Sindh Institute of Child Health & Neonatology, Benazir Income Support Programme, Health Services Academy, Moawin Foundation, and Aga Khan University. These collaborations facilitated a wide range of initiatives, including policy dialogue, technical consultations, think tank engagements, workshops, and conferences, aimed at advancing national ECD frameworks and operational guidelines, developing multisectoral data systems, and addressing critical areas such as caregivers' mental health and its implications for early childhood development.

Through these collaborations, PAFEC played a central role in building the capacity of educators, front-line workers, practitioners, and other ECD professionals. By co-designing and delivering training programs, skill-building sessions, and professional development opportunities, often in partnership with UNICEF, Sindh Institute of Child Health & Neonatology, and other national and international stakeholders, the Alliance helped strengthen the ECD workforce, promote evidence-based practices, and foster a shared understanding of holistic early childhood development across Pakistan.





Two-day Training for Akbar Kare Institute

A two-day training was conducted on January 8-9 for Akbar Care Institute, an institutional member based in Peshawar. The institute, a rehabilitation center founded by a mother of a child with cerebral palsy, approached PAFEC for support in building the capacity of its staff in Early Childhood Development (ECD). The staff includes doctors, therapists, and other professionals. In response, Samina Ghafur and Khadija Khan traveled to Peshawar to deliver the training, with accommodation and transportation provided by the institute. A total of 32 staff members participated in the training; they collectively provide rehabilitation services to children with physical disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders. To date, the center has served over 30,000 children from various districts across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).



Three-day training on Early Childhood Development (ECD) in collaboration with Ministry of National Health Services and UNICEF

A three-day training on Early Childhood Development (ECD) was held on February 11-13, 2025, at District Hospital Haripur. The training was organized by UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of National Health Services and the Health Services Academy, Islamabad. Khadija Khan, representing PAFEC, participated as one of the master trainers, alongside Dr. Fatima and Dr. Kameela from Children's Hospital Lahore and Dr. Tausif Janjua from the Ministry of Health. The training covered key aspects of ECD, including conceptual understanding, the significance of the first 1,000 days, early brain development, developmental milestones, red flags, screening for developmental delays, and nurturing care for optimal child development from conception to age eight. Additionally, it emphasized positive parenting and Key Family Care Practices (KFCPs).



A total of 23 participants including doctors—particularly gynecologists and pediatricians—as well as nurses from DHQ Haripur and district coordinators for health. Through presentations, discussions, and interactive Q&A sessions, the training provided valuable insights and practical knowledge on these crucial topics. At the conclusion of the programme, participants developed action plans to integrate Early Childhood Development (ECD) into district-level health services.

Launch of the National Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy Framework and Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Youth Network

PAFEC was invited to the launch of the National Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy Framework and the SUN Youth Network on 20 February 2025 at the Pakistan Secretariat, Islamabad. The event was hosted by the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MoPD&SIs) in collaboration with UNICEF and was chaired by the Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives. The National ECD Policy Framework provides strategic direction and institutional mechanisms for Early Childhood Development interventions across Pakistan.

As part of the event, the SUN Youth Network was formally established in collaboration with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). The platform enables youth and youth organisations to support national nutrition efforts through leadership, advocacy, and social entrepreneurship. Both initiatives strengthened multi-sectoral collaboration, youth engagement, and strategic action to advance early childhood development and nutrition nationwide.

Access to Justice in Pakistan for Child Victims and Survivors of Sexual Exploitation Workshop

Team PAFEC participated in and contributed to workshops organized by ECPAT International and PAHCHAAN, in collaboration with the National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC), Child Rights Group of the Pakistan Pediatric Association (CRG-PPA), and Globark Institute of Development and Training (GIDAT), on 17th-18th February on 'Access to Justice in Pakistan for Child Victims and Survivors of Sexual Exploitation'.

The initiative aimed to address the critical challenges faced by child victims and survivors of sexual exploitation in accessing justice and exercising their right to remedies. It also sought to identify and tackle systemic barriers within Pakistan's justice system that hinder children from seeking legal protection, redress, and rehabilitation in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. The two-day event, facilitated by Mr. Guillaume Landry, Executive Director of ECPAT International, fostered invaluable discussions, offering participants the opportunity to share insights on this pressing issue and propose timely and effective solutions.

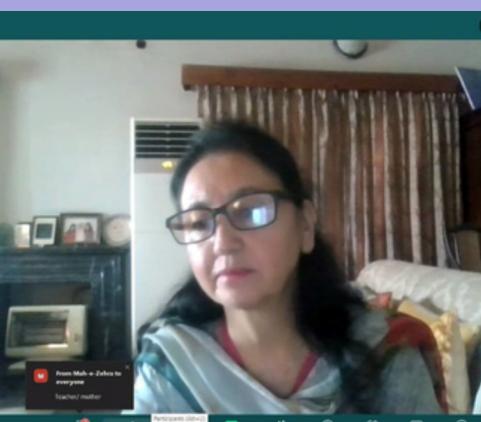
Meezan Podcast by Radio Pakistan



On 18th March, Khadija Khan, CEO of Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood, was invited as a guest speaker for Meezan Podcast by Radio Pakistan where she discussed about the critical role of early childhood development in shaping a child's future alongside the host, Sohaib Bin Noor. They further reinforced the significance of the important phases of Early Childhood Development (Zero – age 8), particularly the first 1,000 days, the impact of parenting, and why a holistic approach—beyond just early education—is essential. Many crucial functions—such as vision, hearing, understanding, speaking, comprehension and emotional regulation—develop during these early years, making this phase crucial for a child's overall growth.

They also highlighted the importance of a nurturing home environment for children's well-being. Khadija Khan shares insights on Pakistan's early years' curriculum development, and a breakthrough with the recent launch of the National ECD Policy Framework.

YES! YOU CAN Global Foundation Positive Parenting Session



As part of its SheNurtures Fellowship, the YES YOU CAN FOUNDATION invited Khadija Khan as the expert speaker for a Positive Parenting session on July 20, focusing on the Nurturing Care through Emotional Growth. Khadija Khan expertly detailed that holistic child development relies on Nurturing Care starting prenatally, with parents serving as primary role models. Emphasizing the critical window from pregnancy to age five for brain development, the concept of positive parenting was defined as a responsive, loving approach focused on building emotional connection and trust beyond mere physical provision.

A key insight highlighted the need to integrate fathers as equal caregiving partners and address adverse childhood experiences such as physical punishment, emotional neglect, child labor, and early marriage. Strategies focused on the “Five Love Languages”, positive reinforcement, respectful communication, and gentle discipline techniques like offering choices and distraction instead of punishment.

Online Workshop on Early Childhood Caregivers' Disaster Preparedness in Northern Pakistan

PAFEC is committed to addressing the critical importance of disaster preparedness and its profound effects on young children and their caregivers. This focus is especially timely and relevant given the recent disasters in Pakistan. In a demonstration of this shared commitment, Ms. Khadija Khan was invited by the ECD PREP Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Aga Khan University to co-facilitate a pivotal webinar on Disaster Preparedness (August 8). She collaborated alongside AKU experts Ms. Misbah Shams (ECD PREP, ObGyn) and Ms. Sajida Aziz from the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat.

Discussions highlighted the role of caregivers during disasters, emphasizing emotional reassurance, maintaining routines, and clear communication to help children feel safe. Participants explored psychosocial strategies such as recognizing emotional impacts, promoting safe expression through play and storytelling, and ensuring stability through consistent routines. The session also stressed caregivers as "emotional first responders" and the importance of self-care to remain emotionally available. Parents and educators were guided on preparedness and response measures, from family emergency plans to addressing children's behavioral changes, underscoring a holistic, trauma-informed approach to resilience and recovery for both children and caregivers.

Early Childhood Development Center Operationalization in Collaboration with Sindh Institute of Child Health & Neonatology (SICHN) and UNICEF

On behalf of PAFEC, Ms. Khadija Khan, facilitated a day-long training session as a Master Trainer on the Operationalization of Early Childhood Development (ECD). The training was organized by the Sindh Institute of Child Health & Neonatology (SICHN) in collaboration with UNICEF on August 19 at the Integrated Quality Research & Training Academy (IQRA), SICHN, Karachi. A total of 25 staff members (doctors, DHOs) attended the training and developed action plans for ECD Centers established in government hospitals across Sindh.

Protecting Little Lives: Disaster Preparedness for Early Childhood Caregivers – A webinar for Northern Areas

Organized By
ECD PREP Department of ObGyn

Speakers:

- Misbah Shams**
ECD PREP, ObGyn
Aga Khan University
- Khadija Khan**
Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood
- Sajida Aziz**
Aga Khan Agency for Habitat

Course Content

- Disasters
- Preparedness for Disasters
- Mental health and wellbeing in and after disasters
- What parents, teachers, and caregivers can do

Who Can Attend?

- Parents, Teachers, & ECD Educators of Northern Areas of Pakistan

Date:
08th August 2025

Timing:
02:00 pm - 02:45 pm

Venue:
Zoom

A certificate of Attendance will be provided to the participants who will register and fill the evaluation link





The training aimed to provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of holistic child development, with a particular emphasis on early brain development and the importance of the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF). It also offered hands-on experience in operationalizing Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centers within government hospitals, drawing on Aga Khan University's experience in establishing low-cost ECD centers in rural areas. Additionally, the training sought to strengthen participants' capacity to identify developmental delays using specialized assessment tools and intervention strategies.

Day 1 technical sessions explored holistic child development from conception to age eight, integrating physical, social, emotional, language, and cognitive growth. Khadija Khan explained sensitive periods when the brain is most receptive to forming neural connections and emphasized that nurturing, secure environments strengthen development, while poor nutrition, limited stimulation, and exposure to violence or pollution can disrupt it. She furthered presented the Nurturing Care Framework as a roadmap for coordinated, evidence-based action to support children's optimal development, protect them from adversity, and strengthen resilience. While caregivers play a central role, enabling policies, quality services, and strong community support are essential to provide effective nurturing care.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) Kits Operationalization Training Workshop & Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation (MMS) Orientation in Collaboration with Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and UNICEF



PAFEC supports organisations whose missions align with its own, including the Benazir Nutrition Program (BNP) and its goal to build stronger futures for Pakistan's children. In a demonstration of this alignment, Ms. Khadija Khan, participated as a facilitator in a critical two-day capacity building workshop on the use of Early Childhood Development (ECD) Kits in 540 BISP facilitation centers across Pakistan jointly organized by Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and UNICEF on Aug 26-27. The workshop also focused on strengthening the effective implementation of Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation (MMS) through the Benazir Nashonuma Programme (BNP).

Approximately 43 participants attended, including BISP Coordinators and representatives from the World Food Programme (WFP). The workshop aimed to enhance participants' understanding of ECD principles and the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF), strengthen implementation of Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation (MMS) through BNP, and provide hands-on training on the effective use of ECD Kits in BISP facilitation centers nationwide. The sessions were facilitated by Khadija Khan along with resource persons from UNICEF and Children's Hospital Lahore. The training included presentations, interactive discussions, group activities, and practical demonstrations. Participants engaged enthusiastically and learned from research-based videos on topics such as early brain development, the serve and return concept, toxic stress, and nurturing caregiver-child interactions.

A highlight was a group activity on the Nurturing Care Framework, where participants explored each component, identified key elements, and discussed practical ways to apply them in their departments. The hands-on session with ECD Kits reinforced learning, with resource persons demonstrating materials and guiding participants in designing creative, developmentally appropriate activities.

Silent Stories, Big Questions: Building Imagination & Inquiry in Young Learners

We recognize that meaningful investment in the early years of life offers the highest returns to society and shapes the most desirable outcomes for personal, societal, and national development. Reflecting this understanding, Khadija Khan, CEO PAEC, and Zehra Khushal, Curriculum Expert, organized and moderated a webinar on 'The Use of Silent Storybooks in Fostering Inquiry-Based Learning, Critical Thinking, and Imagination among Young Children.' on October 4.

The session explored how storytelling supports prenatal bonding and early brain development, while emphasizing how silent books nurture imagination, empathy, and inquiry among young learners. It also highlighted how questioning strategies can strengthen children's critical thinking and creativity, laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning. The panel featured Ayşegül Dede, Author and Teacher Trainer from Turkey; Dr. Audrey Juma, Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Programme from Australia; and Hanifa Baig, ECD Coordinator at the Aga Khan Foundation, Pakistan.



TIFL Podcast - TABLE TALK Ep. 02 - PAFEC x Tifl | Building a Better Childhood ft. Khadija Khan

Tools for Innovative Family Learning (TIFL), an online parenting platform offering expert guidance and personalized support, launched its insightful podcast series "TIFL Table Talk", aimed at empowering parents with trusted advice and practical tools to nurture healthy and happy children from day one. PAFEC, represented by its CEO Ms. Khadija Khan, was invited as a guest for Episode 2 of the podcast on 29 October. The episode continued TIFL's tradition of honest and thought-provoking conversations around parenting, education, early childhood development, and the realities of modern family life. Through reflective dialogue, the discussion emphasized the importance of creating nurturing environments that support both children and caregivers.

This episode explored how a better, healthier, and more supportive childhood experience can be built for every child in Pakistan. Key discussion areas included the current state of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Pakistan, why the first five years are critical in shaping a child's lifelong outcomes, PAFEC's on-ground initiatives and national impact, challenges faced by parents and educators, and how TIFL and PAFEC are jointly working to empower families through reliable, evidence-based support. The episode served as a valuable resource for parents, educators, policymakers, and all stakeholders committed to advancing child development and early learning across Pakistan.

Brain and Mind (BMI) International Conference 2025 convened by Aga Khan University

PAFEC participated in the Brain and Mind (BMI) International Conference 2025, 'Building Thriving Communities', organized and hosted by the Aga Khan University at its Karachi campus, Pakistan, from November 3 to 5, 2025. The conference convened a diverse group of experts, researchers, policymakers, and community leaders to discuss and address pressing issues in brain and mental health. The conference featured a comprehensive programme of pre-conference workshops, panel discussions, thematic sessions, e-poster presentations, and a film screening.

Key sessions provided deep dives into healthy brain ageing and dementia in LMICs, with insights on prevention, diagnosis, and caregiving. Critical conversations addressed the mental health impacts of the climate crisis, including its link to rising suicide rates, and explored pathways to community resilience. Further discussions highlighted innovative approaches to integrating mental health with non-communicable disease care, as well as emerging trends in digital mental health—including AI, telepsychiatry, and mobile applications—to expand access in underserved settings. Throughout, the agenda emphasized collaborative, cross-sector opportunities to co-create scalable, contextually relevant solutions for the Global South.

National Consultation Workshop on the Development of Early Childhood Development (ECD) Operational Guidelines by Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives

The Concentration Workshop on ECD Guidelines was organized by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, with support from UNICEF, the World Health organisation-Pakistan, and the Aga Khan University on 13 November. The workshop brought together national and provincial stakeholders to refine Pakistan's ECD Operational Guidelines, ensuring they are evidence-based and focused on nurturing care, health, and early learning for every child, with Ms. Khadija Khan participating as a key stakeholder.

Through plenary discussions and group work, participants synthesized and validated key findings from provincial consultations, strengthened cross-sectoral alignment between national and provincial ECD priorities, and co-developed draft ECD Operational Guidelines using a participatory, consensus-driven approach aligned with the Nurturing Care Framework.



Consultative Meeting on the Multisectoral Nutrition & ECD Dashboard by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives and SUN Secretariat, in collaboration with UNICEF

The Sun Secretariate - Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives in collaboration with UNICEF, organized a meeting on the development of a Multisectoral Nutrition & Early ECD Dashboard on 14 November. The dashboard is designed as a centralized platform to track, analyze, and visualize progress on 206 ECD indicators across health and nutrition, WASH, education, and social welfare, supporting policymakers and practitioners with timely data for planning and resource allocation. The consultation included an overview of existing data systems and platforms in Pakistan and group exercises to prioritize the proposed indicators, ensuring they cover age-appropriate milestones such as language and social-emotional development.

PAFEC participated in the discussions, alongside other stakeholders, as the meeting also considered linking thematic areas, such as education and nutrition, and incorporating global and regional experiences in ECD dashboards. The session concluded with a roadmap for dashboard rollout, including pilot testing, capacity building, and integration into national and provincial monitoring systems, with a focus on quality control and adaptation to Pakistan's context.

Scientific Session on Early Childhood Development, 15th International Public Health Conference conducted by Health Service Academy

PAFEC participated in the 15th International Public Health Conference on November 18, 2025 at NHSA Islamabad, where Ms. Khadija Khan co-chaired the Scientific Session on ECD. In her powerful opening, she championed the irreplaceable role of parenting, stating that the key to a healthier future for our children and our nation lies in supporting parents, as "parenting isn't failing — the system is." She championed effective parenting—through love, play, and responsive care—as the core of child development, urging four key supports: prioritizing parental mental health, embedding parental support, integrating parenting into curricula, and using low-cost, culturally rooted tools.





The sessions then moved to feature presentations and a panel discussion highlighting key themes, including Climate Change and Early Childhood Development, The Role of Parenting in ECD, Linkages between Maternal Mental Health and Child Development, and The Economic Case for Investing in the First 1,000 Days. The session concluded with a question-and-answer segment engaging the younger generation, followed by key takeaways and shields and certificates distribution.

RSPN's Policy Advocacy Workshop: Voices for Education – from Evidence to Action

Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) hosted a high-level policy advocacy workshop titled "Voices for Education: From Evidence to Action" on 25 November at Shamadan Hall, Serena Hotel, Islamabad. The forum convened government representatives, policymakers, education practitioners, development partners, educators, and community voices to collaboratively discuss challenges and identify a unified way forward for scaling resilient education systems in Pakistan. PAFEC was invited to participate in the discussions, contributing alongside other stakeholders.

The event aimed to ensure that every child, particularly those in crisis-affected rural areas, has access to quality, inclusive education by showcasing successful practices, recognizing contributions from key partners, and advocating for concrete policy reforms. The workshop employed a participatory format with interactive group discussions, panel sessions, beneficiary testimonies, a video screening, and a tableau/miming presentation, designed to foster actionable outcomes.



Two-day Capacity-building Training of Front-Line Workers on the Optimizing Parenting Package for Early Childhood Development conducted by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, SUN Secretariat, in collaboration with UNICEF

TMs. Khadija Khan participated as a master trainer in a two-day capacity-building workshop held on 1-2 December 2025. The workshop was conducted by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives (MoPD&SI), SUN Secretariat, in collaboration with UNICEF for frontline workers of the Department of Health, Islamabad. The workshop focused on strengthening participants' conceptual understanding of Early Childhood Development (ECD) from birth to age eight, with particular emphasis on early brain development, the significance of 1st 1000days, the importance of Nurturing Care Framework, and the Key Family Care Practices. The two-day workshop provided an opportunity for participants to deepen their learning through group work, discussions, questions, and presentations. They found the training highly relevant and expressed a strong commitment to applying the learning in their daily work.

Deliberation on Early Childhood Development by the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, in partnership with UNICEF, Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood, Allama Iqbal Open University, and Rupani Foundation

On December 23, 2025, the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives(MoPD&SIs), in partnership with UNICEF, Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC), Allama Iqbal Open University, and Rupani Foundation, convened a deliberation on Early Childhood Development. The programme centered on three key priorities: translating the ECD Policy Framework into action, reviving the Think Tank on Caregivers' Mental Health and its impact on ECD, and finalizing the programme for the 5th International Conference on ECD.

Over 30 technical experts participated in the deliberation, including ECD and parenting specialists, developmental pediatricians, psychotherapists, public mental health professionals, and representatives from various organisations.

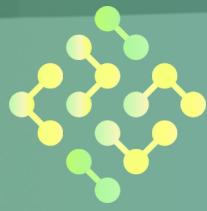
The session began with opening remarks by Dr. Nazeer Ahmed, Chief Nutritionist and SUN Focal Point, MoPD&SI. This was followed by presentations on translating the ECD policy framework into action by Dr. Saba Shuja, ECD Manager, UNICEF Pakistan; the Revival of the Think Tank on Caregivers' Mental Health and its impact on ECD by Ms. Khadija Khan, CEO, PAFEC; and finalizing the programme for the 5th International Conference on ECD by Dr. Tooba Saleem, Assistant Professor, Department of Early Childhood Education & Care.

Discussions explored practical pathways for implementation, highlighting the need for strong intersectoral collaboration and the critical role of civil society, inclusive data systems, religious scholars, large workshops, and field partners in operationalizing the policy at the community level. Particular emphasis was placed on maternal mental health as a foundation for healthy child development, including safe pregnancies and births, maternal nutrition and education, and early screening of children to identify learning difficulties.

Capacity-building Session for mothers and fathers, organized by Team PARWAAZ

On 27 December, Khadija Khan conducted an awareness-raising and capacity-building session for mothers and fathers, organized by the Team PARWAAZ. The session focused on the importance of positive daily interactions and nurturing care in Early Childhood Development (ECD), with the aim of strengthening caregivers' understanding of how everyday interactions influence children's brain development, emotional wellbeing, learning, and long-term outcomes.

The session provided a space for parents, particularly mothers, to share common parenting challenges such as managing difficult behaviors, tantrums, screen time, communication gaps, and stress related to social and economic pressures. These concerns were addressed through practical guidance grounded in ECD principles, including responsive caregiving, serve-and-return interactions, emotional regulation, and viewing children's behavior as a form of communication. The discussion emphasized that nurturing care can be practiced through everyday interactions without special resources. Participants reflected on the value of warm, consistent relationships, fathers' involvement, positive discipline, and predictable routines, concluding with practical actions for daily life and increased confidence to adopt nurturing parenting practices.



Literacy at Home Key Practices

Establish
Reading Ritual

Expose to
Environmental
Print

Engage in
Functional
Literacy

WEBINAR SERIES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT- 2025

Encourage
Storytelling



Maria Qaisar 2:58
Functional ability to recompute w effectively everyday lit
Amreen Zahra 2:58
Ability to use skills to perf
Maria Qaisar 2:58
Yes
Who can s
Message everyone

Building Strong Foundations for Every Child

Guided by its mandate, PAFEC has been actively promoting holistic ECD over the years through a range of key activities, including awareness webinars aimed at strengthening ECD knowledge. Building on this experience, PAFEC made a strategic decision in 2025 to formalize these efforts by launching a dedicated webinar series, moving beyond standalone or ad hoc sessions. Following careful planning, engagement with subject-matter experts, and the identification of priority themes, the 2025 webinar series officially took flight on 14 April.

Seven episodes of the webinar series were released, exploring key Early Childhood Development (ECD) themes. Topics included speech and language delays; art and play as therapy for emotional development; the foundational role of the first five years in shaping lifelong physical and mental wellbeing; empowering parents through localized ECD models; autism in young children and the importance of early intervention; creating literacy-rich home and school environments; fostering social-emotional learning in early education.

The 2025 webinar series brings together ECD experts, practitioners, caregivers, parents, representatives from civil society organisations (CSOs), and professionals from the health, nutrition, and education sectors, alongside child rights activists. Together, these stakeholders create a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange and advocacy, promoting nurturing care, conscious parenting, and holistic ECD. The sessions are designed to deliver expert-led, evidence-based insights alongside practical strategies to support inclusive ECD practices.

The series was met with exceptional acclaim, drawing a strong and engaged turnout, reflecting a re-energized and responsive audience. This critical acclaim underscores the growing demand for credible, evidence-based dialogue on ECD and reaffirms PAFEC's role as a trusted convener and knowledge hub within the ECD ecosystem.



1

Understanding
and Addressing
Speech and
Language Delays
in Young Children

14th April

Guest Speaker:
Ms. Shumaila Bibi
Director PediaCare
Therapy Clinic

2

Colors, Clay &
Connection: Unlocking
Emotions through
Art and Play Therapy

24th April

Guest Speaker:
Dr. Semra Salik
Clinical Psychologist
Director PsychCare

3

Foundations of
Forever: How the
First Five Years
Shape a Lifetime of
Physical and
Mental Wellbeing

17th July

Guest Speaker:
Dr. Roop Zainab Rana
CEO The Healing Triad
Expert Infant Mental Health



4



5



6

**Empowered Parents:
Nurturing Early
Childhood
Development - Agah
Walidain Model**

29th July

Guest Speaker:
Ms. Pari Bano
Senior ECD Lead, Rupani
Foundation

**Exploring Autism
in Young Children:
From Concerns to
Early Intervention**

27th August

Guest Speaker:
Dr Shagufta Jabeen
Founder, Embrace Autism
Pakistan, Paediatrician

**Building Literacy-
Rich Environments:
Homes and Schools
as Gateways to
Lifelong Learning**

10th September

Guest Speaker:
Dr. Shelina Bhamani
Asst. Professor, Aga Khan
University



7

Teaching with Heart: The Role of Social- Emotional Learning in Early Learning

9th December

Guest Speaker:
Elaine Kim
CEO and
Co-Founder of Trehaus

Elizabeth Wu
Head of Curriculum
Co-Founder of Trehaus



Thank you for a very informative talk. It really makes you realize that, while many ideas are good theoretically, in practice we—both teachers and parents—often fail to handle our children with patience for various reasons, including cultural norms. Sessions like this are essential to help change mindsets and improve the way we nurture our kids.

Sadruddin Qutoshi (Participant)

Associate Professor of Educational Development, Karakoram International University

Webinar Overviews

Understanding and Addressing Speech and Language Delays in Young Children



We hosted our first webinar of the 2025 series with PediaCare Therapy Clinic, titled "Understanding and Addressing Speech and Language Delays in Young Children", featuring guest speaker Shumaila Bibi, Director of PediaCare Therapy Clinic and a dedicated expert in the field of speech and language therapy. The session highlighted key early developmental milestones, red flags to look out for, and the long-term benefits of timely intervention. By age 3, warning signs include not using simple sentences, inability to follow two-step commands, and lack of pretend play. By ages 4-5, red flags include disorganized speech and language, difficulty answering "who, what, where, why" questions, and behavior issues. These signs point to the need for early evaluation and support. The session also addressed common myths, such as believing children will talk when they want to, assuming delayed speech in boys is always normal, or thinking that knowing ABCs and numbers is enough. Another misconception is that children will simply "outgrow" their speech delays without therapy.

These myths often delay crucial interventions. Speakers emphasized the importance of early intervention, taking advantage of brain plasticity to improve language, communication, and academic readiness. Early action strengthens social and emotional development, reduces the need for long-term therapy, and prevents challenges from compounding over time. The webinar underscored the role of speech therapy across multiple settings, including home and school, and highlighted the responsibility of teachers and parents in providing consistent support. It concluded with a call for greater awareness, inclusive practices, and collaboration between healthcare providers, educators, and communities to ensure that children with communication challenges receive the help they need.

Colors, Clay & Connection: Unlocking Emotions through Art and Play Therapy



For our second webinar of the 2025 series, we partnered with PsychCare to conduct an insightful webinar titled "Colors, Clay & Connection: Unlocking Emotions through Art and Play Therapy", featuring guest speaker Dr. Semra Salik, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Director PsychCare. This insightful session brought together parents, experts and practitioners to explore innovative therapeutic approaches for supporting children's emotional and developmental needs. The webinar focused particularly on helping children with Autism, ADHD, and learning differences, though the techniques discussed benefit all children. Participants learned about various play therapy methods including child-led non-directive play, symbolic play using miniatures, and creative art interventions like drawing and sculpting. These approaches provide children with a work

with alternative ways to communicate feelings they might struggle to express verbally-unveiling the art of the invisible, sculpting and capturing their own likeness. Through color choices, children often reveal unspoken emotions-bold reds might express anger, while white may reflect attentiveness. The session emphasized creating a safe, judgment-free environment where children can explore emotions at their own pace. Dr. Semra cautioned against common pitfalls to avoid in art therapy like over-interpreting a child's work or pressuring them to explain their creations, which can hinder the therapeutic process. The webinar also showcased practical tools and techniques that can be easily incorporated into different settings - from therapy clinics to classrooms and homes. These included sensory toys for emotional regulation, puppets for storytelling, and musical instruments for creative expression. Dr. Semra demonstrated how even simple materials like clay or board games can become powerful therapeutic tools when used intentionally. The session reinforced that through creative play and art, children can find their voice and begin their healing journey.

Foundations of Forever How the First Five Years Shape a Lifetime of Physical and Mental Wellbeing



For our third webinar, we were pleased to host Dr. Roop Zainab Rana, CEO The Healing Triad, Psychiatrist, Expert Infant Mental Health, as our guest speaker to present "Foundations of Forever: How the First Five Years Shape a Lifetime of Physical and Mental Wellbeing". This engaging session explores how the first five years of a child's life shape their lifelong health, happiness, and success. The first 1,000 days and earliest experiences form the most critical window for physical and mental growth-from emotional bonding to stress responses, shaping the foundation for brain development, learning, resilience, and how early relationships influence everything from immunity to emotional regulation. The discussion explains how children's brain development is profoundly shaped by their environment and caregiving experiences.

The brain shifts between fight-or-flight for emergencies and rest-and-digest for growth, but chronic stress traps children in survival mode, limiting learning and emotional regulation. Trauma disrupts connections between emotional and thinking areas, while nurturing environments and diverse experiences strengthen gut health and neural development. Effective parenting starts with adults regulating their own emotions and supporting children through routines, empathy, and perspective-taking. Healthy development requires balancing safety ("roots") with exploration ("wings"), tailored to each child's needs. Parents should combine scientific understanding with cultural wisdom, rejecting Western norms that contradict beneficial traditions like close physical contact with infants. The session concluded with key takeaways such as maintaining realistic expectations for age-appropriate behavior, understanding that development

occurs through daily interactions, and recognizing that meeting parental needs enables better caregiving. Ultimately, thousands of small positive moments, where children feel both secure and gently challenged, build the foundation for lifelong wellbeing, resilience and learning capacity.

Empowered Parents: Nurturing Early Childhood Development - Agah Walidain Model



The momentum continued with our fourth webinar of the 2025 series, presented in collaboration with Rupani Foundation on the webinar titled "Empowered Parents: Nurturing Early Childhood Development - Agah Walidain Model", featuring guest speaker Ms. Pari Bano, Senior ECD Lead, Rupani Foundation. This engaging session introduces Rupani Foundation's Early Childhood Development programme, their "Agah Walidain Model" which supports children's holistic development through parent and caregiver engagement across 120 centers in Pakistan. The session offered valuable insights into the foundation's impactful work in early childhood development across Pakistan. The model is designed to address the multifaceted needs of young children, during the critical first 1,000 days of life-starting from conception through age three.

Key components of the programme include maternal and child health initiatives, parental engagement sessions such as "Me and My Dad," health and nutrition sessions, and mobile ECD services. A cornerstone of the model is the role of Family Support Motivators (FSMs)-trained ECD educators who work directly with parents. Through home visits, regular group sessions, and community outreach, FSMs guide and empower families, raise awareness, and promote positive parenting practices. The Agah Walidain Model places strong emphasis on community mobilization, ensuring that support for early childhood development is embedded not just within families, but across the wider community. By integrating health, education, and parental support, the model aims to create a nurturing environment where every child can grow, learn, and reach their full potential.

Exploring Autism in Young Children: From Concerns to Early Intervention



For the fifth webinar in our 2025 series, we hosted Dr Shagufta Jabeen, Founder Embrace Autism Pakistan, Paediatrician, and RDI certified Consultant, to present the webinar titled "Exploring Autism in Young Children: From Concerns to Early Intervention". This vital session expanded on autism spectrum disorder. The discussion explored various aspects of autism, including diagnostic criteria, signs and symptoms, causes, and the importance of early identification and support. It also focused on

therapeutic approaches, societal support for autistic individuals, and the need for acceptance and inclusion in educational and social settings. She explained diagnostic criteria and tools such as the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers and the Childhood Autism Rating Scale, emphasizing the importance of early identification and timely support. Signs discussed included deficits in social interaction, speech delays, repetitive behaviors, and reduced eye contact. Parents were encouraged to seek help from pediatricians or psychologists if such red flags appear. The session also explored causes, noting the role of genetics (8–16%) alongside environmental factors like diet, lifestyle, and screen time. Dr. Shagufta stressed acceptance and understanding of autistic individuals, noting differences in brain processing and possible co-occurring conditions like ADHD. She outlined therapeutic approaches such as play, behavioral, speech, occupational, and creative therapies. The session emphasized autism as a different way of being and concluded with a call for inclusion and support.

Building Literacy-Rich Environments: Homes and Schools as Gateways to Lifelong Learning



We presented our sixth webinar hosted by Dr. Shelina Bhamani (Ph.D in Education & ECD, Asst. Professor, Program Director Outreach Education & Lead ECD PREP ObGyn Aga Khan University) on the topic of "Building Literacy-Rich Environments: Homes and Schools as Gateways to Lifelong Learning". The engaging session focused on creating literacy-rich environments, particularly in early childhood development and education. Dr. Shelina highlighted literacy as a foundational skill that shapes economic participation, civic engagement, and social life. She emphasized the importance of integrating literacy into both homes and schools through diverse activities and resources. The discussion addressed strategies for supporting children with different learning styles and fostering inclusive environments in multilingual settings, where exposure to multiple languages enriches development.

Dr. Shelina outlined five core principles for building literacy-rich environments: print saturation, oral language foundation, active engagement, integration with play, and scaffolding. She called attention to creating immersive, print-rich spaces with visual story corners and environmental print, emphasizing the cross-disciplinary nature of literacy. She further highlighted the importance of peer learning, balanced literacy approaches, and interactive classroom environments. The discussion also encouraged student authorship, and using technology effectively for literacy development. Dr. Shelina addressed common challenges in writing and reading, suggesting pre-writing exercises and creative activities to help children develop these skills, and the session concluded with practical strategies for implementation.

Teaching with Heart: The Role of Social-Emotional Learning in Early Learning



The 7th episode, our most recent, of the webinar series advanced further, this time in collaboration with Trehaus and Little Lab, featuring the session titled 'Teaching with Heart: The Role of Social-Emotional Learning in Early Learning'. It was held on 9 December 2025 at 14:00 PKT/17:00 SGT. Guest speakers Dr. Elaine Kim (CEO and Co-Founder of Trehaus) and Ms. Elizabeth Wu (Head of Curriculum and Pedagogy Co-Founder of Trehaus) took us on a journey to explore how caregivers, teachers, and parents can cultivate emotional intelligence through purposeful play, project-based learning, and intentional relationships—renewing their own sense of purpose and passion in the process. Both speakers detailed the Trehaus Method and Little Lab curriculum, a holistic educational model integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) with cognitive and physical development. This approach is delivered through 10 flexible modules and a practical Teaching Toolbox for educators. The webinar highlighted the method's successful and positive application in Pakistan, demonstrating its strong cross-cultural relevance. The core philosophy emphasizes that true learning begins with the heart, positioning emotional security as the essential foundation for cognitive growth and compassionate, engaged learning.

The Trehaus Method champions a fresh, hands-on approach that focuses on the whole child by integrating learning through the heart, head, and hands, guided by the latest research in early childhood education. Its principles are grounded in playful, inquiry-driven and project-based pedagogy, a child-centred approach that celebrates each child's individuality, and a strong emphasis on character development, values, and future-ready skills. The webinar concluded with participants demonstrating strong interest in adopting the Trehaus Method, highlighting its adaptability across cultural contexts.





ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The Promise of Endless Opportunities

Since its inception in 2021, the online certification course has successfully completed four cohorts, emerging as a trusted platform for professional ECD learning. With expert facilitation and a strong emphasis on practical knowledge, it has trained more than 530 participants and continues to expand its influence.

PAFEC, through this course, aims to develop a foundational understanding of Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), with a focus on the child's holistic development—social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical domains—along with learning, care, protection, and overall well-being from birth to eight years of age.

We concentrate our efforts on strengthening and imparting holistic Early Childhood Development (ECD) across Pakistan through our highly regarded flagship Online ECD Certification Course. Before the course even begins, a great deal of thought, research, design, and planning goes into shaping its structure. This includes defining learning outcomes, developing the curriculum, and conducting outreach.

Overview

55

Participants Trained

20

Sessions

50+

Hours of Learning

92%

Passing Percentage

30+

Engaging Activities and
Assignments

In January 2025, we carried out a comprehensive needs assessment for the fifth cohort to better understand emerging trends, gaps, and priorities within the ECD ecosystem. While there was already clear interest and demand for the course, we further analyzed the broader ECD landscape to ensure relevance and responsiveness.

Recognizing the importance of institutional collaboration, we partnered with Moawin Foundation, which enabled the participation of a large batch of their teachers in need of training for their respective schools.

The course was delivered by a dedicated team of expert resource persons working across ECD and ECCE policy, curriculum development, workforce development, teacher education, parental coaching, inclusive education, and educational technology, which included our CEO Ms. Khadija Khan, Ms. Samina Ghafur, Ms. Arooj Malik, Ms. Zehra, Dr. Shezad Mithani, and Dr. Semra Salik. Their collective expertise and commitment ensured both academic depth and strong practical relevance throughout the programme.

The fifth cohort brought together 55 participants from diverse backgrounds, including teachers, students, parents, caregivers, and professionals, creating a rich and inclusive learning community. Spanning 20 comprehensive sessions, the course builds a strong foundation in Early Childhood Development by exploring key developmental domains—physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language development.

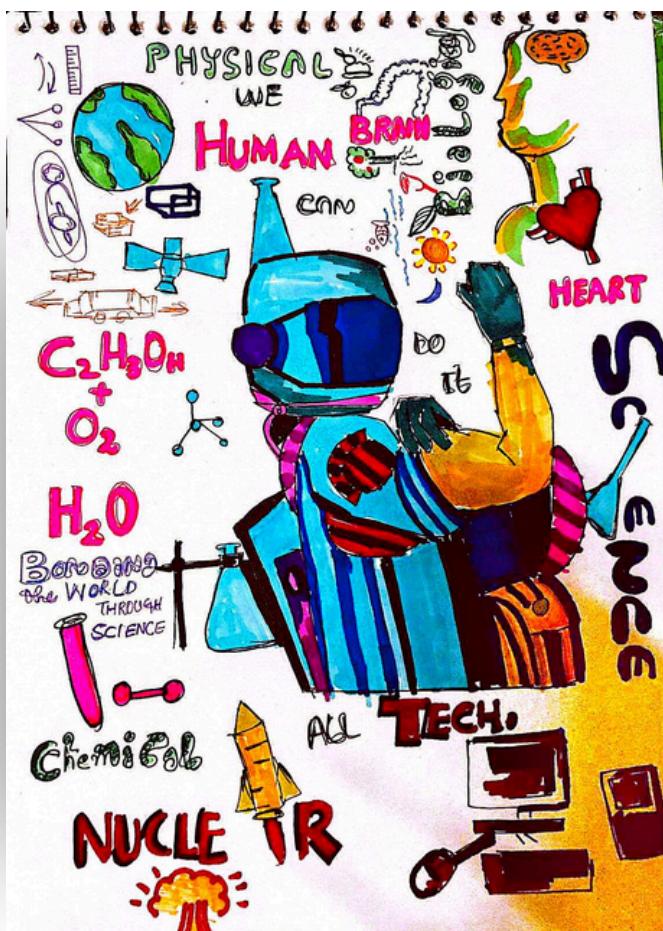
The curriculum emphasizes age-appropriate milestones from birth to age 12 and equips participants with practical skills in self-regulation, positive parenting, and play-based learning. Participants were also introduced to effective and responsible use of educational technology, along with age-appropriate approaches to teaching science, mathematics, and language from the early years through Grade V.

In addition, the course familiarizes learners with the National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education, global best practices in ECD, and the Sustainable Development Goals, with particular emphasis on SDG 4.2. Participants also engaged deeply with the Nurturing Care Framework and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, focusing on its four core principles: the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, survival and development, and participation.

The learning experience was further enriched through interactive activities, quizzes, group assignments, and participant presentations, fostering active engagement, collaboration, and applied learning throughout the programme.



A look at the assignments completed by participants showing how learning can be translated into creative, real-world application. One such project, shared by participant Asma Rasheed, a teacher from Moawin Foundation, involved a student-led crafts activity at her school that raised awareness about deforestation and highlighted the positive impact of tree planting on the environment and local communities.



Our course activities encouraged participants to think critically and creatively. As part of an activity titled "Write or draw your connection to science in everyday life," Fizza Tariq, an energetic teacher from our 5th cohort, shared a vibrant submission that beautifully captured the essence of science in daily experiences. Her work showcased how curiosity and imagination bring science to life in daily life.



Post-course application of learning was equally encouraging. Yashal Noor, a participant from the fifth cohort, applied insights from our session on low- and no-cost learning materials in her classroom, sharing how simple, accessible resources improved students' counting skills and increased their engagement and enthusiasm.

Participants shared positive feedback, noting the relevance, quality, and impact of the course, as well as the meaningful learning experience it offered. Improvements reflected in pre- and post-test assessments demonstrate the course's effectiveness in strengthening knowledge and professional competencies.

By training a diverse cohort, the initiative supports the advancement of early childhood care and education practices across Pakistan, inspiring participants to apply ECD strategies within their communities and workplaces.

By leveraging an online format, PAFEC removes geographic barriers, bringing participants from all provinces together on a single platform. The certification course expands access to quality ECD education while fostering collaboration and a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children nationwide.



The quality of the material was consistently high with clear explanations and practical examples. Overall the course provided a valuable learning experience and was very positive and contributed significantly to my learning

Tahira Abid

Lift Islamabad Road Schools



CONTINUATION OF THE PODCAST SERIES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT WITH IBEX MEDIA NETWORK

TRANSFORMING SOCIETY
THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Early Childhood Development Takes Center Stage

We have witnessed the widespread reach of social media which has become increasingly ubiquitous and unconstrained by geography, connecting communities across the nation and beyond. Advocacy, too, has evolved alongside these platforms, transforming how knowledge is shared—making it more accessible, dynamic, and far-reaching. In 2023, to strengthen awareness and advocacy for quality and holistic Early Childhood Development (ECD), we embarked on a dedicated media initiative, recognizing the power of digital platforms as partners for change. In collaboration with Ibex Media Network, PAFEC launched a podcast series titled Transforming Society through Early Childhood Development.

With **Episodes 24-27** released in 2025, the series has continued its growth since launching in May 2023, reaching a total of 27 episodes to date and receiving an enthusiastic response marked by strong viewership and engagement. The podcast features CEO PAFEC Ms. Khadija Khan as the host, joined by experienced and renowned experts, including resource partners, researchers, caregivers, policymakers, frontline workers, educators, advocates, child rights activists, government counterparts, civil society representatives, academics, and multisectoral professionals, along with other key stakeholders.

Together, these conversations translate knowledge, research, and evidence-based practices into accessible and engaging content. Through podcasts, social media, and other digital platforms, PAFEC leverages media to widely disseminate evidence-based information, model positive parenting practices, and foster meaningful, interactive engagement.





#24

POSTED ON JANUARY 30, 2025

Enhancing Early Childhood Development through Teachers' Professional Growth



#25

POSTED ON MAY 17, 2025

Adverse Childhood Experiences and their Long-term Mental and Physical Impact on Children



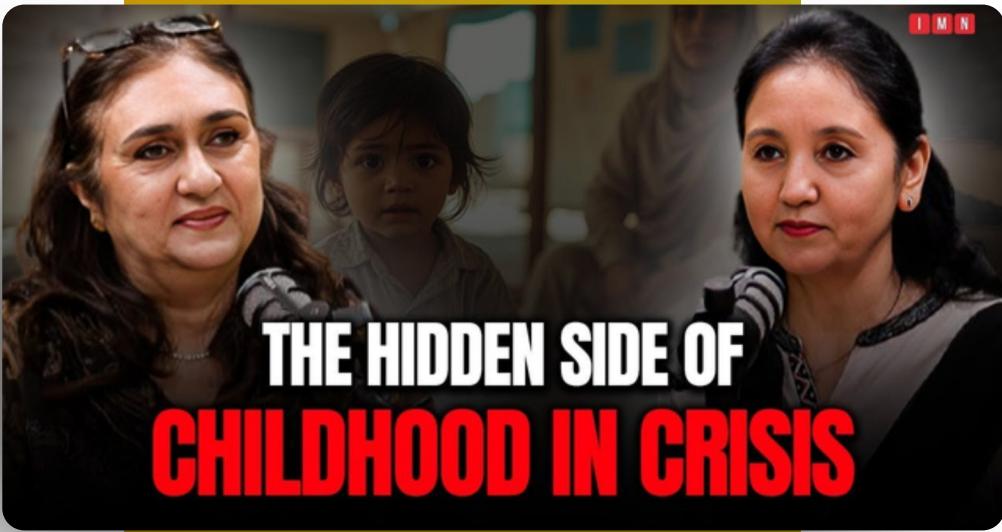


THE FOUNDATION OF A CHILD'S FUTURE
ft. Nasir Mehmood and Khatija Khan

#26

POSTED ON MAY 27, 2025

**Role of AIOU in Professionalizing
ECD Sector and Workforce
Development in Pakistan**



**THE HIDDEN SIDE OF
CHILDHOOD IN CRISIS**

#27

POSTED ON OCTOBER 14, 2025

**International Rescue Committee's
Approach to Early Childhood Development
in Emergencies and Beyond**



Podcast Overviews

Enhancing Early Childhood Development through Teachers' Professional Growth



In the 24th episode of the podcast series, Syeda Saima Mazhar, National Coordinator for Early Childhood Development at the Aga Khan Education Service, Pakistan (AKESP), discusses how teacher training and community-based models are strengthening early learning nationwide. She explains that AKESP operates 158 schools and satellite campuses, providing pre-primary education to children as young as two through flexible, context-responsive structures, particularly in regions like Gilgit-Baltistan. Rather than rigid curricula, the approach emphasizes social-emotional development, communication, collaboration, and activity-based learning, with strong engagement from families and local volunteers. In underserved areas, AKESP supports informal learning spaces, builds local capacity through targeted teacher training, and promotes low-cost strategies to improve literacy and numeracy. Integrated within the Aga Khan Development Network, this holistic model connects education with health, nutrition, and family support, while prioritizing girls' education, inclusion, and the value of every child.

Adverse Childhood Experiences and their Long-term Mental and Physical Impact on Children



In the 25th episode, Dr. Naeem Zafar, a leading pediatrician, Chairman of the Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC), and President of PAHCHAAN, explores the lifelong impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the importance of prevention in early childhood. He explains how adversity can begin even before birth, citing high rates of low birth weight and stunting in Pakistan, and stresses the critical role of the first 1,000 days, when most brain development occurs. Drawing on his experience establishing Pakistan's first hospital-based child protection unit, Dr. Naeem emphasizes shifting from reactive care to preventive systems. He discusses PAHCHAAN's Mother and Child Health Centers, which integrate protection, health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, and early learning, and are influencing policy and practice. The episode highlights inclusive education, empathy for invisible trauma, positive parenting, community engagement, and the transformative power of investing early in every child's development.

Role of AIOU in Professionalizing ECD Sector and Workforce Development in Pakistan



In the 26th episode, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mehmood, Vice Chancellor of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), discusses the university's efforts to professionalize Early Childhood Care and Education through technology and distance learning approaches in Pakistan. AIOU's Faculty of Education, one of the largest in Pakistan, includes a dedicated department for ECE and offers postgraduate and bachelor's programmes in the field.

The university published Pakistan's first academic journal on Early Childhood Care and Education and organized national and international conferences to advance research and collaboration. In partnership with PAFEC, AIOU also introduced certificate courses for parents to build awareness and capacity. Dr. Nasir outlines plans to establish a Center of Excellence for Early Childhood Development to support training, research, and remote learners. He acknowledges a major disconnect between training institutions and recruitment agencies, noting that untrained teachers are often hired and trained on the job. His key messages emphasize nurturing children with trust and love, the importance of trained educators, compassionate teaching, research-driven practices, and inclusive, accessible learning for all communities.

International Rescue Committee's Approach to Early Childhood Development in Emergencies and Beyond



In the 27th episode, Ms. Rahat Rizwan, Senior Coordinator for Education and Early Childhood Development (ECD) at the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Pakistan, joins Ms. Khadija Khan, CEO of the Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood, to discuss IRC's work on ECD, particularly in emergency contexts. The podcast explores IRC's global and national approaches to promoting ECD, highlighting the tools and strategies used to support caregivers, families, frontline workers and children in challenging situations and beyond. The conversation also sheds light on IRC's evidence-based approach to programme design and its commitment to ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions. In conclusion, both the expert and the host emphasized the critical role of the government, private sector, and other key stakeholders in investing in ECD as a key strategy for building a happy, healthy and prosperous society in Pakistan.



PODCAST PERFORMANCE SNAPSHOT

**Total
Impressions:**

72.14M

Total Reach:

69.62M



87%

Engagement Rate



90K

Total Shared



700K

Total Clicks



500K

Total Comments

Top Videos



**Screen Trap: Affects of
Longer Screen Time**

4.3M Reach



**Play-based Learning: Enabling
Children to Thrive**

3.3M Reach



PODCAST SERIES WITH UNICEF AND IBEX MEDIA NETWORK ON NURTURING CARE AND POSITIVE PARENTING



Building Strong Foundations for Every Child

PAFEC is proud to continue its podcast series on Parenting and Nurturing Care in Pakistan, now in an expanded partnership with UNICEF and Ibex Media Network. The collaboration has progressed with the successful recording of the first episode in August 2025. Designed to promote holistic Early Childhood Development, the 10-episode Urdu podcast series will target young parents, parents-to-be, caregivers, and extended families across the country. Through expert insights and real-life stories, the series aims to empower parents and caregivers with scientific, practical, and culturally relevant knowledge and skills.

The podcast series will address key themes such as Early Childhood Development as a Unit of Human and Societal Development, Positive & Responsive Parenting, Responsive Caregiving, and Caregivers' Mental Health. The series will feature leading pediatricians, developmental pediatricians, child psychiatrists, psychologists, nutritionists, parental educators, and child rights and early learning experts, representing a significant step toward making evidence-based Early Childhood Development knowledge accessible to families nationwide.

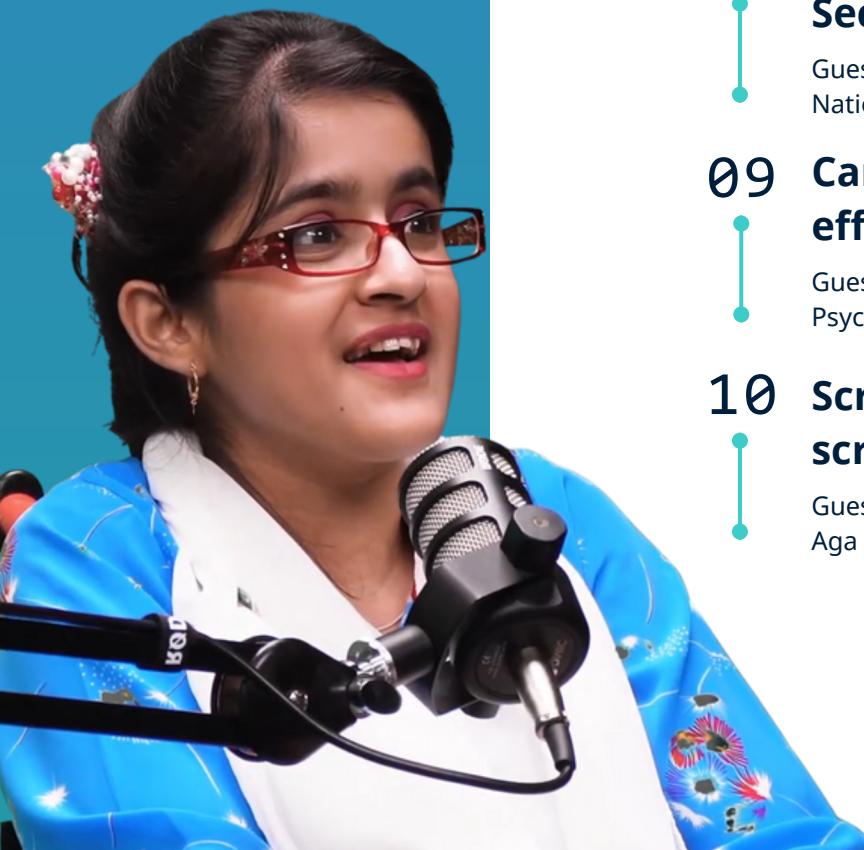
All 10 episodes have been filmed, edited and are currently awaiting review from UNICEF.

01 What is Early Childhood Development?

Guest Speaker: Dr Saba Shuja, ECD Manager, UNICEF

02 Positive Parenting

Guest Speaker: Taqwa Ahmed, her brother and parents



03 **Responsive Caregiving**

Guest Speaker: Dr. Roop Zainab, Psychotherapist and Consultant Psychiatrist

04 **Adequate Nutrition for Child Development from Zero – Age 8**

Guest Speaker: Prof. Dr Junaid Rashid, Professor of Pediatrics and Pro/Vice Chancellor of the University of Child Health Science

05 **Good Health**

Guest Speaker: Prof. Dr. Saima Perwaiz Iqbal, Section Head Family Medicine, Shifa College of Medicine

06 **Play Based Learning and Early Stimulation**

Guest Speaker: Ms. Arooj Malik and her Daughter Anaya Saqib

07 **Early Detection & Early Intervention**

Guest Speaker: Dr Fatima Rehman, Developmental Pediatrician, Children Hospital Lahore

08 **Safety and Security**

Guest Speaker: Dr. Mehek Naeem, Member Punjab, National Commission on the Rights of Child

09 **Caregivers' Mental Health and its effect on Child Development**

Guest Speaker: Dr. Abdul Wahab Yousafzai, Professor of Psychiatry, Shifa International Hospital

10 **Screen Trap: Effects of longer screen time**

Guest Speaker: Dr Kishwar Inam, Consultant Pediatrics, Aga Khan University



A KEY PRIORITY

CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER: HOW MENTAL HEALTH SHAPES CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Support the Caregiver, Nurture the Child

Caregivers' mental health, the emotional and psychological well-being of those raising and supporting children, is crucial for healthy child development. Stress, anxiety, or depression in caregivers can limit their ability to provide consistent care and warmth, affecting children's security, learning, and social growth, while mentally healthy caregivers foster resilience and positive development.

Global progress in this area remains critically limited. A 2019 analysis of funding for child and family mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in development and humanitarian assistance found that only 0.31% of official development assistance and just 1% of private sector funding was allocated to these activities. Mothers, as the predominant caregivers, experience mental health challenges during the perinatal period, from pregnancy to 1 year postpartum, that can significantly affect their psychosocial well-being, physical health, and overall quality of life.

In Pakistan, the average household size is about 6.7 members, with 3 to 4 of them being children. This means nearly every family has at least one person in a caregiving role. Consistent with other patrilineal cultures, child-rearing is often a shared responsibility, with multiple family members contributing to care, particularly female relatives such as mothers-in-law, aunts, and older sisters.

Mother-in-law caregiving was common in the first year postpartum. At 3 months, both low and high involvement (vs. none) were linked to lower rates of perinatal depression, regardless of family conflict. By 12 months, low involvement reduced depression in families without conflict, but in families with conflict, high involvement increased depression. Caregivers' mental health is shaped by a combination of psychosocial, economic, and physical health factors and stressors, which also influences children's development and well-being.



To address these issues, a Think Tank on Caregivers' Mental Health was established on July 25, 2024, where PAFEC, in partnership with the Rupani Foundation and Allama Iqbal Open University, and in collaboration with UNICEF and other relevant stakeholders, organized a half-day session titled "Maternal Mental Health and Its Impact on Early Childhood Development." The session explored maternal mental health across multiple stages, including pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, postpartum depression, the lactation period, and beyond, and examined gaps and challenges within existing support systems for mothers in Pakistan. Approximately, 40-45 experts

participated, including psychiatrists, developmental pediatricians, gynecologists, parental educators, child protection specialists, nutritionists, and representatives from organisations actively working in this field. Key issues highlighted during the discussion included the high prevalence of postpartum depression, significant gaps in maternal mental health services, and the impact of maternal mental health on children's development. Participants emphasized the need for a national maternal mental health strategy, the expansion of community-based interventions such as the Thinking Healthy Programme (THP).



The use of digital health solutions to bridge service gaps was also proposed. The importance of integrating maternal mental health awareness and parenting skills into school and university curricula was also underscored, alongside the recommendation to establish a permanent think tank to drive research, policy advocacy, and cross-sector collaboration. As a way forward, it was proposed to coordinate efforts across institutions and to engage teachers and youth as community-level mental health facilitators, strengthening outreach and support at the grassroots level.

The webinar was attended live by 92 participants out of 200 registered; however, several participants joined groups using shared devices, indicating that the actual reach was significantly higher. Certificates of participation were given out to the attendees. The session was widely acclaimed and appreciated as timely and essential, responding to an urgent need for informed dialogue and practical guidance in the sector.



As a key recommendation emerging from both the roundtable and the online panel discussion, the formation of a Think Tank on Caregivers' Mental Health was proposed. Building on this, PAFEC, in partnership with MoPD&SI, UNICEF, Allama Iqbal Open University, and the Rupani Foundation, convened a deliberation on Early Childhood Development on 23 December 2025, where caregivers' mental health was identified as a key programme priority.

Reigniting the Think Tank was considered a timely and pivotal step. A total of 26 multisectoral experts were finalized, and their Terms of Reference (TORs) were established. The Think Tank aims to provide technical expertise and policy-relevant recommendations to strengthen the promotion, prevention, and care of caregivers' mental health across health, ECD, social protection, and community systems.



OBJECTIVES

- Understand the prevalence, nature, and depth of Caregivers' Mental Health Issues – exploring how widespread these challenges are and what forms they take in different contexts
- Examine the Impact of Caregivers' Mental Health on Child Development – highlighting the effects on children's emotional security, learning, nutrition, and long-term well-being
- Identify contributing factors and barriers – analyzing psychosocial, cultural, economic, health, and crisis-related influences that shape caregivers' mental well-being
- Highlighting local and global models and evidence-based practices that successfully support caregivers' mental health and improve child outcomes

Recognizing the need to address caregivers' mental health at scale, the Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood has made it an integral theme across its programmes, campaigns, and advocacy initiatives. We have actively engaged in awareness-raising, policy dialogue, and advocacy on caregivers' mental health and its impact on child development, which lies at the core of its mission to advance early childhood outcomes.

This key priority had its groundwork laid by PAFEC, in collaboration with the Rupani Foundation, Allama Iqbal Open University, and UNICEF, during a Roundtable discussion held on July 25, 2024, titled 'Maternal Mental Health and Its Impact on Early Childhood Development.'

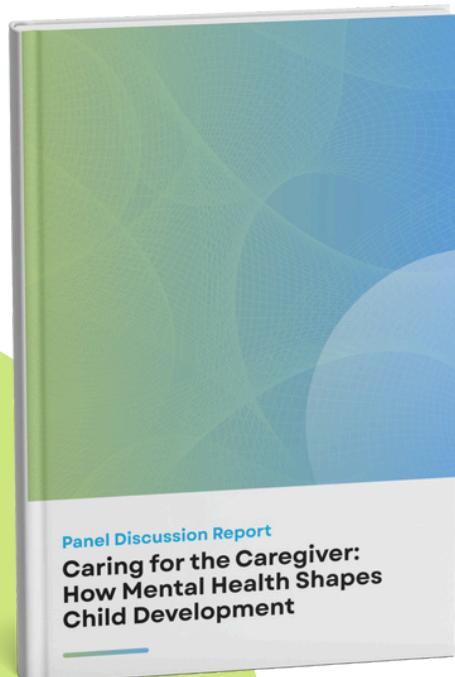
To maintain momentum, we conducted an **Online Panel Discussion** in partnership with the Rupani Foundation and UNICEF. Titled "Caring for the Caregiver: How Mental Health Shapes Child Development," it was held on 17 October 2025 at 17:00 PKT.

Key topics included maternal depression, the joys and burdens of motherhood, the impact of caregiver stress on brain development, the importance of trauma-informed early development, and best practices, with speakers sharing policy recommendations and programme strategies to support both caregivers and children.



The programme was moderated by Dr. Saba Shuja, Manager ECD, UNICEF, and Ms. Khadija Khan began with opening remarks, introduction of objectives, and a brief overview of the session. The first round of discussion featured four expert speakers, Dr Abdul Wahab Yousafzai, Professor & Head, Department of Psychiatry, Shifa International, Dr Roop Zainab

Rana, CEO and Psychiatrist at The Healing Triad, Expert Infant Mental Health, Dr Fatima Rehman, Assistant Professor, Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics at The Children's Hospital; Dr Alaptagin Khan, Assistant Neuroscientist, Investigator, Harvard Medical School) delivering presentations on caregivers' mental health and its impact on child development.



The second round of discussion focused on evidence-based best practices delivered by Mr. Jalal-ud-Din, CEO, Rupani Foundation, and actionable recommendations, with experts suggesting steps to integrate caregiver mental health into maternal, child health, and education policies and programmes.

The full report of the panel discussion is available for a comprehensive overview of the session.

The webinar was attended live by 92 participants out of 200 registered; however, several participants joined groups using shared devices, indicating that the actual reach was significantly higher. Certificates of participation were given out to the attendees. The session was widely acclaimed and appreciated as timely and essential, responding to an urgent need for informed dialogue and practical guidance in the sector.



As a key recommendation emerging from the online panel discussion, reviving the Think Tank on Caregivers' Mental Health was proposed. Building on this, PAFEC, in partnership with MoPD&SI, UNICEF, Allama Iqbal Open University, and the Rupani Foundation, convened a deliberation on Early Childhood Development on 23 December 2025, during which caregivers' mental health was identified as a key programme priority.

The Think Tank was revived based on the previous list of 2024, with new participants added and earlier members consenting to continue, resulting in a multisectoral group of 26 experts whose Terms of Reference (TORs) were established. The Think Tank is tasked with providing technical expertise and policy-relevant recommendations to strengthen the promotion, prevention, and care of caregivers' mental health across health, ECD, social protection, and community systems.



PLANNING FOR THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Investing in Early Childhood Development - Building Human Capital

Asia is now at a historic moment, requiring urgent investment in young children to secure long-term human capital, climate resilience, and social stability. With its emerging ecosystem of government leadership, academic infrastructure, community innovation, and development partnerships, Pakistan is well-positioned to host the 5th International Conference on Early Childhood Development. The conference aims to accelerate political, financial, and multisectoral commitments needed to build a robust, inclusive, and climate-resilient ECD system for Pakistan and the wider Asian region.

The 4th International Conference on ECD (2023) brought together over 350 delegates and produced strong recommendations. The 5th conference aspires to exceed this momentum, driving key milestones, reforms, and policies across the region. With all this considered, preparations for the conference began in October 2024, following its announcement by Rupani Foundation and Allama Iqbal Open University in August 2024.

The Conference Core Committee was notified by the Vice Chancellor AIOU. The Committee developed the concept note, finalized themes and sub-themes, designed the abstract poster, and initiated active planning. This included holding regular meetings of the conference committee, identifying and contacting national and international speakers, drafting the programme, and budget, and reaching out to potential donors and collaborators for resource mobilization.

The conference is projected to take place on April 7-8, 2026.



While significant preliminary work has been completed—including partner meetings with Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Rupani Foundation, and UNICEF—financial support has remained limited. A donors' meeting was held in March 2025, attended by 12 representatives from various donor organisations. Although some donors, including UNICEF, expressed interest, the financial commitments received were modest.



It was agreed that approximately 70 percent of conference participants would be drawn from field practitioners and 30 percent from academia, ensuring a balanced integration of practical experience and evidence-based research. Subsequently, a planning meeting was held on 8 December with AIOU, during which the conference dates were finalized

After careful calibration, collective discussions, realigning priorities, and assessing the current situation, a clear path forward has been established. On 21 October, Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Vice Chancellor of AIOU, held a meeting with Mr. Waseem Samad, CEO of Apex & Co, accompanied by Ms. Khadija Khan.

The meeting focused on reviewing progress in the construction of the Centre of Excellence for ECD at AIOU and discussing plans for the upcoming International ECD Conference.

for 7–8 April. Following another coordination meeting on 18 December, dissemination activities for the conference officially commenced. The conference website, programme structure, and thematic areas were comprehensively revamped, and registrations for participation and abstract submissions were formally launched to ensure wide engagement.



MEMBERSHIP DRIVE AND GLOBAL ECD NETWORK ENGAGEMENT

Global ECD Network Updates and Collaborations

Owing to PAFEC's active digital engagement, strategic collaborations with national and international institutions, and the extensive reach of its webinar and podcast series, the Alliance has consistently expanded its network. Expanding and strengthening the membership base remains a continued priority. In 2025, significant growth was recorded, with 83 individual members (up from 44 in 2024) and 13 institutional members joining the Alliance. This growth demonstrates the strong outreach and engagement impact of PAFEC's ongoing initiatives. The surge in membership in 2025 reflects renewed institutional interest and confidence in PAFEC's leadership in advancing Early Childhood Development (ECD) across Pakistan.

PAFEC shares updates and collaborates with international networks, ensuring that its initiatives and progress are widely communicated. Its work has been featured in the community newsletters of the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) and in the open forums of the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN). PAFEC also actively participates in webinars, meetings, and capacity-building courses, further strengthening knowledge exchange, partnerships, and its presence in global Early Childhood Development networks.

ECDAN
Early Childhood Development Action Network

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ARNEC
Asia-Pacific Regional Network
for Early Childhood

ARNEC Community Updates

ARNEC Community Updates

May 2025

ARNEC is pleased to share with you the Community Updates that contains knowledge products, events, and other noteworthy information from us and our partners in the region on ECD and other advocacy priorities.



The 2025 Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Early Childhood Development (ECD) is now less than 60 days away. The Conference, to be held on 1-3 July in the Philippines, aims to highlight the critical role of local governments in delivering inclusive, high-quality early childhood development services.

ARNEC is pleased to announce that we have extended the Early Bird offer until 15 May. Do note that this will be the last extension, so make best use of this new deadline!

Last week, we also shared about the pre-conference workshops, which will be held on 30 June. Here's a quick recap, in case you missed it.

Session 1: Building Climate-Resilient Early Childhood Development: Integrating ECD in Emergencies and Climate Response. This session will be led by ARNEC and will prepare stakeholders to respond more effectively to crises while building resilient ECD systems that protect young children's development and rights.

Session 2: Leveraging Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) for Promoting Diverse, Inclusive, and Resilient Early Childhood Development. This session will be led by ARNEC and UNESCO Bangkok, and will feature a regional knowledge-sharing session on SEL in ECD, enabling countries to exchange best practices and lessons learned.

Session 3: The International Guide for Monitoring Child Development (GMCD). This session will be by Unimed Child Development Center, and will introduce the GMCD tool to monitor and support child development, identify children at risk and delays, and offer child-specific support.

Session 4: From Margins to Center: Inclusive Book Development through Child Participation. This session will be led by Save the Children and Perkins School for the Blind, and will showcase practical and inclusive methodologies to meaningfully engage children – especially those with disabilities and from indigenous communities – in co-creation of educational books.


Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood launches 2025 Webinar Series

The Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC) has been a leading advocate for holistic ECD in Pakistan for over a decade. With an aim to strengthen the ECD ecosystem for children in Pakistan, PAFEC has launched its 2025 Webinar Series. The first two episodes, titled "Speech and Language Delays in Young Children," and "Colors, Clay & Connection: Unlocking Emotions through Art and Play Therapy," have been released featuring speakers such as Ms. Shumaila Bibi, a qualified Speech and Language Pathologist, and Dr. Seema Salik, Consultant Clinical Psychologist.

The Episode 1 guides parents, educators, and community workers through key early speech and language milestones from birth to five years, emphasizing what typical development should look like at each stage. It highlighted red flags for potential delays and clarified common myths to prevent harmful delays in seeking help.

The Episode 2 explores innovative therapeutic approaches for supporting children's emotional and developmental needs, particularly on helping children with Autism, ADHD, and learning differences. Participants learned about various play therapy methods such as drawing and sculpting to help children communicate feelings they might struggle to express verbally; understanding unspoken emotions through color choices; and the use of sensory toys such as clay for emotional regulation, puppets for storytelling, and musical instruments for creative expression.

[Watch Episode 1](#)
[Watch Episode 2](#)

and teaching approaches.
 • Interactions with community members, ICDS staff, and key government agencies, providing insight into India's holistic ECD ecosystem.


UNICEF shares toolkit on childhood lead poisoning levels, sources

The Partnership for a Lead-Free Future, led by UNICEF, is developing a toolkit to support governments working to end childhood lead poisoning by 2040. The first tool in this toolkit on "Understanding childhood lead poisoning levels and sources" is now available, including a complementary webinar. The tool includes guidance on conducting a foundational lead assessment, involving a preliminary mapping of sources of lead in the environment, and an analysis of the types of sources and unknowns on the extent of lead poisoning in low- and middle-income countries, initial steps required to improve understanding of the problem, and a framework on how to mitigate it.

[Read More](#)

Story that inspires change: UNICEF features a Child Development Coordinator in Nepal

LEADING BY EXAMPLE: In Kanchanpur, far-western Nepal, Sunita is showing what's possible when positive parenting starts at home. As a Child Development Coordinator, Sunita is part of the UNICEF Child Development Services in partnership with UNICEF and the local government — and with generous contributions from the Swiss National Committee for UNICEF — Sunita is now helping families adopt nurturing, informed caregiving practices noted in love, play, and connection.

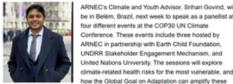

ARNEC Community Updates

November 2025

ARNEC is pleased to share with you the Community Updates that contains knowledge products, events, and other noteworthy information from us and our partners in the region on ECD and other advocacy priorities. In this month's update, we share:

- ARNEC's participation in COP30.
- ARNEC, UNESCO and KIX EMAP's joint webinar to launch the Regional ECD Fast-track.
- ARNEC, HI ECD Coalition's training on parenting for fathers in Indonesia.
- ARNEC's upcoming webinar on engaging youth for ECD and Climate Change.
- ARNEC's participation in a capacity building workshop on ECD and Climate Change.
- Dr. Christine Chen's advocacy for SEL at International Early Childhood Conference.
- UNICEF's message on stress in caregivers:
- a baseline study from India that reveals using available digital tools can help engage fathers in parenting.
- UNICEF's 2025 Asia-Pacific Annual Report 2024.
- Act for Early Years Campaign.
- a new comprehensive study on undernutrition in urban poor children.

To view upcoming ARNEC events, scroll down to the bottom or [click here](#)

ARNEC at COP30: Pushing for child rights as critical in climate agenda


ARNEC's Climate and Youth Advisor, Sathish Govind, will be in Berlin, Brazil, next week to speak as a panelist at four different events at the COP30 UN Climate Conference. The conference is being organized by ARNEC in partnership with Earth Child Foundation, UNDRR Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, and UNICEF. The theme of the conference is how to move climate-related health risks for the most vulnerable, and how the Global Goal on Adaptation can amplify these worldwide.

ARNEC will also launch its Youth Advocacy Film, featuring real footage of the impact of climate change on young children, captured by seven young champions from across the region. The film will be screened at the side event "Health, Migration and Displacement in a Changing Climate," hosted by WHO, United Nations University International Institute for Global Health, IFRC, and World Federation of Public Health Associations.

For more updates from ARNEC at COP30, stay tuned to our social media channels.

While the climate discussions at COP30 will primarily focus on broader targets that often forget the most vulnerable group — young children — the ECD community must continue to advocate for the inclusion of children in climate discussions. Children's needs are included in climate actions that are formulated by world leaders. To help you advocate, here's our top pick from the 2025 Asia-Pacific Regional Conference. Here is a summary of the key takeaways from the discussion on how climate change disproportionately affects children; it is still possible to alter trajectories.

[Prof. Alvin Siau: Data and Evidence on Building Climate Resilient & Resilient ECD Systems](#)

For more resources on ECD and Climate Change, scroll down to the bottom.

ARNEC, UNESCO Bangkok, KIX EMAP advance regional dialogue on ECD

ARNEC, KIX EMAP Hub, and UNESCO Bangkok will organize a webinar on November 14, 2025, to advance regional dialogue on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECD) in Asia and the Pacific (with attention to EMAP Hub partner countries) and strengthen the role of governments, experts, and partners in the region to take action. The webinar will provide governments, experts, and partners with an opportunity to share experiences, highlight promising practices, and discuss concrete actions to accelerate ECD progress in the region.

- Join the online meeting on Zoom (1-hour duration)
- Nov 14 10:00-11:00 Geneva/CET / 15:00-17:00 Bangkok/ICT
- [See more, visit this site](#)

[Register Here for Webinar](#)
PAFEC organises webinars on SEL and caregivers' mental health

Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC) continued its webinar series in the final quarter of 2025, hosting Episodes 7 and 8 on mental health and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). In Episode 7, speakers from the medical community, including The Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, examined caregiver and maternal depression, the challenges and rewards of motherhood, and the effects of caregiver stress on child brain development. Discussions highlighted trauma-informed early development, evidence-based best practices, and strategies to integrate caregiver mental health into maternal, child health, and education policies and programmes. In Episode 8, the discussion focused on nurturing emotional intelligence, resilience, empathy, and relationship skills in young children through purposeful play and intentional learning experiences.

[Watch recordings of Episode 7 and Episode 8.](#)

ARNEC takes part in Capacity Building Workshop on ECD & CC in Bangladesh

The Bangladesh ECD Network (BEN) organized an online Capacity Building Workshop on Climate Change and ECD on 28 October 2025, where ARNEC shared the findings of the 2025 Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on "Addressing Climate Change on Impact of Climate Change on Young Children: Lessons from the Asia-Pacific Region," joined by ARNEC partners Karma Gayley (Bhutan) and Sylla Andras (Indonesia). The workshop was organized by the National Institute of Early Childhood Education (NIECE) and engaged over 50 participants, including students from IUB, NSU, BRAC University, and Bangladesh Medical University, as well as journalists and professionals working on ECD, climate change, health, nutrition, and emergency response.


Dr. Chen, member of ARNEC's Board of Directors, advocates for SEL at IECC

Dr. Christine Chen, a member of ARNEC's Board of Directors, recently attended the International Early Childhood Conference (IECC) in Malaysia as one of the keynote speakers. Addressing the conference theme, "Connecting Body, Mind, and Heart: Empowering Early Childhood Education," Dr. Chen highlighted the importance of SEL for the social and emotional well-being of educators. In her keynote presentation, she emphasized that teachers have a vital responsibility to care for their own emotional and mental health, as they directly influence the children in their care. She also introduced the R.U.L.E.R. framework as a practical resource for fostering emotional intelligence.

- R - Recognizing emotions in oneself and others
- U - Understanding the causes and consequences of emotions
- L - Labeling emotions accurately
- E - Expressing emotions appropriately
- R - Regulating emotions effectively

For more, refer to [UNESCO and ARNEC's Asia-Pacific Early Childhood Care and Education Teacher Training Handbook for SEL](#).

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2025 Webinar Series on Early Childhood Development

by  Khadija Khan | 09-23-2025 07:54

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Khadija Khan



Webinar Series on Early Childhood Development

April 2025 - September 2025

Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAECE) has been actively promoting Early Childhood Development (ECD) through some of the most innovative and engaging research and advocacy of the field to foster collective understanding and action. These webinars bring together ECD experts, practitioners, caregivers, parents, representatives from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and professionals from the health, nutrition, and education sectors, alongside child rights activists. Together, they create a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange and advocacy, promoting holistic and inclusive ECD practices.

By featuring renowned national and international experts in inclusive ECD, nurturing care, and conscious parenting, the sessions provide leading insights and practical strategies for promoting holistic ECD. Below are the summaries of the webinars being held since April 2025 till September 2025, highlighting key points of the webinars:

14th April, 2025

[Webinar 1: Understanding and Addressing Speech and Language Delays in Young Children](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POKtZRwFB>

We hosted our first session of the 2025 series, with PsychCare Therapy Clinic, titled "Understanding and Addressing Speech and Language Delays in Young Children", featuring guest speaker Shumaila Bibi, Director of PsychCare Therapy Clinic and a dedicated expert in the field of speech and language therapy. The session highlighted key early developmental milestones, red flags to look out for, and the long-term benefits of timely intervention. By age 3, warning signs include not using simple sentences, inability to follow two-step commands, and lack of pretend play. By

24th April, 2025

[Webinar 2: Colors, Clay & Connection: Unlocking Emotions through Art and Play Therapy](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFOKtZRwFB>

For our second webinar of the 2025 series, we partnered with PsychCare to conduct an insightful webinar titled "Colors, Clay & Connection: Unlocking Emotions through Art and Play Therapy", featuring guest speaker Dr. Semra Salik, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Director PsychCare. This insightful session brought together parents, experts and practitioners to explore innovative therapeutic approaches for supporting children's emotional and developmental needs. The webinar focused particularly on helping children with Autism, ADHD, and learning differences, though the techniques discussed benefit all children. Participants learned about various play therapy methods including child-led non-directive play, symbolic play using miniatures, and creative art interventions like drawing and sculpting. These approaches provide children with alternative ways to communicate feelings they might struggle to express verbally—unveiling the art of the invisible, sculpting and capturing their own likeness. Through color choices, children often reveal unspoken emotions—bold reds might express anger, while white may reflect attentiveness. The session emphasized creating a safe, judgment-free environment where children can explore emotions at their own pace. Dr. Semra cautioned against common pitfalls to avoid in art therapy like over-interpreting a child's work or pressuring them to explain their creations, which can hinder the therapeutic process. The webinar also showcased practical tools and techniques that can be easily incorporated into different settings—from therapy clinics to classrooms and homes. These included sensory toys for emotional regulation, puppets for storytelling, and musical instruments for creative expression. Dr. Semra demonstrated how even simple materials like clay or board games can become powerful therapeutic tools when used intentionally. The session reinforced that through creative play and art, children can find their voice and begin their healing journey.

17th July, 2025

[Webinar 3: Foundations of Forever: How the First Five Years Shape a Lifetime of Physical and Mental Wellbeing](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXWN3w6Y9vM>

For our third webinar, we were pleased to host Dr. Roop Zainab Rana, CEO The Healing Triad, Psychiatrist, Expert Infant Mental Health, as our guest speaker to present "Foundations of Forever: How the First Five Years Shape a Lifetime of Physical and Mental Wellbeing". This engaging session explores how the first five years of a child's life shape their lifelong health, happiness, and success. The first 1,000 days and earliest experiences form the most critical window for physical and mental growth—from emotional bonding to stress responses, shaping the foundation for brain development, learning, resilience, and how early relationships influence everything from immunity to emotional regulation. The discussion explains how children's brain development is profoundly shaped by their environment and caregiving experiences. The brain shifts between fight-or-flight for emergencies and rest-and-digest for growth, but chronic stress traps children in survival mode, limiting learning and emotional regulation. Trauma disrupts connections between emotional and thinking areas, while nurturing environments and diverse experiences strengthen gut health and neural development. Effective parenting starts with adults regulating their own emotions and supporting children through routines, empathy, and perspective-taking. Healthy development requires balancing safety ("roots") with exploration ("wings"), tailored to each child's needs. Parents should combine scientific understanding with cultural wisdom, rejecting Western norms that contradict beneficial traditions like close physical contact with infants. The session concluded with key takeaways such as maintaining realistic expectations for age-appropriate behavior, understanding that development occurs through daily interactions, and recognizing that meeting parental needs enables better caregiving. Ultimately, thousands of small positive moments, where children feel both secure and gently challenged, build the foundation for lifelong wellbeing, resilience and learning capacity.

...

Interventions and supports, in addition to therapeutic approaches, include social support, positive interactions, and the need for acceptance and inclusion in educational and social settings. She explained diagnostic criteria and tools such as the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers and the Childhood Autism Rating Scale, emphasizing the importance of early identification and timely support. Signs discussed included deficits in social interaction, speech delays, repetitive behaviors, and reduced eye contact. She also discussed environmental factors such as family history or psychopathology. If such risk factors are present, she highlighted the importance of early intervention. The role of genetics (9-10%) also plays a major role, along with environmental factors like diet, thyroid, and stressors. Dr. Shagena stressed acceptance and understanding of autism, acknowledging differences in brain processing and possible co-existing conditions like ADHD. She outlined therapeutic approaches such as play, behavioral, speech, occupational, and creative therapies. The session emphasized autism as a different way of being and concluded with a call for inclusion and support.

10th September, 2025

[Webinar 4: Building Literacy-Rich Environments: Homes and Schools as Gateways to Lifelong Learning](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbRwB6G>

We recently presented our sixth webinar hosted by Dr. Shelia Bharmal (PhD in Education & ECD, Asst. Professor, Program Director Outreach Education & Lead ECD PRPP (OES) Aga Khan University) on the topic of "Building Literacy-Rich Environments: Homes and Schools as Gateways to Lifelong Learning". The engaging session focused on creating multilingual environments that support literacy development. It highlighted the importance of literacy as a fundamental skill that shapes economic participation, civic engagement, and social life. It emphasized the importance of integrating literacy into both homes and schools through diverse activities and resources. The discussion addressed strategies for supporting children with different learning styles and fostering inclusive environments in multilingual settings, where exposure to multiple languages facilitates development. Dr. Shelia outlined five core principles for building literacy-rich environments: print saturation, oral language foundation, active engagement, integration with play, and scaffolding. She called attention to creating immersive print-rich spaces with visual story



INTERNAL CAPACITY BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT

Building capacity for lasting impact

As a national alliance, PAFEC fully recognizes its responsibility and credibility as a key stakeholder in promoting holistic Early Childhood Development (ECD) across Pakistan. Understanding the rapidly evolving knowledge, research, and practices in the sector, the Alliance continually invests in strengthening its internal capacity. This includes staying up-to-date through regular trainings, workshops, professional development programmes, and knowledge-sharing engagements, many of which are facilitated or co-delivered by PAFEC's institutional members and expert resource persons. Such engagements ensure that the team remains at the forefront of evidence-based approaches, innovative practices, and emerging frameworks in ECD.

Our team actively integrates the latest research, tools, and practical strategies into its work. PAFEC ensures that all programmes and services are adaptive, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of children, families, and caregivers across different contexts. By learning from institutional members, experts, and global networks, PAFEC continuously refines its approaches, strengthening the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of its interventions.

This commitment to ongoing organisational strengthening not only enhances the reach and impact of PAFEC's initiatives but also reinforces its role as a knowledge hub, capable of guiding policy, fostering multisectoral collaborations, and driving sector-wide improvements. Through this approach, the Alliance demonstrates that strong internal capacity—built through learning, collaboration, and continuous development—is fundamental to sustaining innovative, evidence-based, and holistic ECD initiatives nationwide, and to ensuring that every child receives the nurturing care and developmental support they need to thrive.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Training of Trainers for the Institutional members of PAFEC and the UNCT PSEA Network by UNICEF

Organized by UNICEF for the institutional members of the PAFEC and the UNCT PSEA Network in Pakistan, the five-day Training of Trainers (T o T) workshop on Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) was successfully held from 23-27 June at Margalla Hills Hotel. The workshop aimed to enhance participants' capacity as effective trainers in safeguarding, PSEA, gender-based violence (GBV), and child protection. Through interactive sessions, participants explored critical concepts including national legal frameworks, UN guidelines, and institutional protocols.

The workshop was facilitated by Sampath Parera (Program Manager PSEA) and Muhammad Imtiaz Ahmed (National Consultant PSEA/GBV), along with other high-profile speakers from the UN, humanitarian and governance sector. Participants explored core concepts, legal frameworks, and institutional protocols, including national laws and UN guidelines. The sessions emphasized survivor-centered approaches, effective reporting mechanisms, risk assessments, and organisational response strategies. Practical group work, discussions, and capacity assessments supported participants in developing tools like the Capacity Strengthening and Improvement Plan (CSIP) for their respective NGOs.

The event concluded with a productive plenary discussion, post-training evaluations, and a certificate ceremony, reinforcing the collective commitment to creating safer and more accountable communities. This training represents an important milestone in making PSEAH practices standard across Pakistan's humanitarian and development work. We sincerely thank all our institutional members, trainers, and partners who contributed to this essential safeguarding effort. Your commitment helps create safer spaces for everyone we serve.



Two-day Capacity-building Training on Strengthening Gender Architecture by UNICEF

Ms. Khadija Khan along with other implementing partners, participated in a two-day capacity-building training (6-7 August, Islamabad) on Strengthening Gender Architecture in Pakistan organised by UNICEF. The training aimed to enhance gender-responsive programming, following gender markers at national, provincial, and regional levels.

Over the course of two days, through interactive discussions, role-plays, and group activities, participants explored gender equality, social behavior change, Pakistan's commitments, and challenges like real-life discrimination. They shared real-life issues women and girls face and brainstormed solutions. The training also covered UNICEF's Gender Strategy (2024-2027), making workplaces more inclusive, and practical ways to make programmes more inclusive for girls and women. The training emphasized the importance of reaching the most excluded and underserved populations, addressing issues such as early marriage, malnutrition, and lack of access to education, healthcare, and protection services.



Regional Meeting on ECD in South Asia (Nov 4, 6, 11, 19)

PAFEC participated in the Regional Meeting on ECD in South Asia, held from 4–19 November, as an implementing partner of UNICEF and Pakistan's leading national ECD alliance. The meeting provided an important platform for PAFEC to gather insights on regional progress, best practices, and multisectoral approaches to Early Childhood Development across health, education, nutrition, child protection, and social protection sectors, strengthening the Alliance's capacity to implement evidence-based and contextually relevant programmes.

Day 1 (4 November) focused on ECD in Primary Healthcare and Nutrition, allowing PAFEC to learn from the progress shared by Bangladesh and Nepal. Day 2 (6 November) addressed Parenting Support, offering valuable perspectives from Pakistan and Afghanistan on effective strategies for caregiver engagement. Day 3 (11 November) covered Early Childhood Education and Data, Monitoring, and Evaluation, highlighting tools and approaches for evidence-based planning, learning, and tracking outcomes. The meeting concluded on Day 4 (19 November) with action-planning sessions, including individual discussions with country teams, which provided PAFEC with practical guidance to identify priority next steps for strengthening ECD implementation within Pakistan's national context.

Through this engagement, PAFEC enhanced its understanding of regional trends, reinforced its knowledge of innovative approaches, and strengthened its capacity to deliver responsive, collaborative, and effective ECD initiatives in line with global and regional standards.




Alex Mokori, U...
Arjanne Rietse...
Mita Gupta, UN...

Dr. Rinesh, FWD, DOHS, N...
✓ Alex Mokori, UNICEF R...
✓ Arjanne Rietsema_UNI...
✓ Mita Gupta, UNICEF R...
✓ Dr Budhi Setiawan UN...



Investing in Nepal's Youngest – Early Childhood Development in Nepal



Government of Nepal
Ministry of Health and Population
Department of Health Services
Family Welfare Division

WAY FORWARD





PAFEC is pursuing a strategic project to strengthen Pakistan's ECD ecosystem nationwide. We have submitted a concept note to UNICEF for scaling ECD services through knowledge synergy, networking, and improved access across all provinces and regions: Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, and Islamabad Capital Territory.

The methodology is centered on comprehensive capacity-building to upgrade the competencies of government officials, civil society organisations, legislators, and training institutions. Key activities include capacity-building, harmonizing curricula and standards, integrating holistic ECD into existing programmes, and strengthening monitoring, evaluation, and evidence use. This institutional strengthening will be reinforced by quality assurance for 20 Nurturing Care Centers of Excellence, digital outreach, and direct engagement with parents and caregivers.

If selected, the project will be implemented through a consortium of PAFEC's institutional members, in close collaboration with UNICEF offices and relevant government departments at all levels. Beneficiaries will include government officials, CSO representatives, legislators, and personnel at nurturing care centres as direct beneficiaries. This includes 280 government officials and CSO representatives, 30 legislators, 40 NCCE staff and around 2,000 participants in conferences, policy dialogues, and webinars. Indirect beneficiaries include young children aged zero to eight, parents, caregivers, and professionals across multiple sectors, reaching tens of thousands through awareness campaigns and institutional improvements.



Looking ahead, Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC) aims to deepen its impact by expanding strategic collaborations and initiatives with organisations that share its mission. The Alliance is committed to fostering partnerships, promoting knowledge exchange, and creating opportunities for collective learning to advance holistic Early Childhood Development (ECD) across sectors.

Alongside these efforts, PAFEC will focus on expanding its network of institutional and individual members, strengthening engagement, and building a vibrant community of ECD practitioners, experts, and stakeholders. Focused initiatives will continue to promote the integration of ECD principles into programmes and policies, while exploring opportunities to implement projects that enhance the reach, quality, and sustainability of ECD services nationwide. Through these combined efforts, PAFEC seeks to reinforce its leadership role, foster innovation, and contribute to a stronger, more coordinated ECD ecosystem in Pakistan.

One of the future prospects for PAFEC is fostering coordinated collaboration with the National Commission on the Rights of the Child (NCRC) and PAHCHAAN to support Pakistan's commitments from the Bogotá Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children. Discussions focused on strengthening child protection systems through Hospital-Based Child Protection Units, promoting positive parenting, advancing Early Childhood Development through the national ECD policy, and improving child and adolescent health coverage. The meeting concluded with a reaffirmation of collective commitment to advancing child rights, strengthening institutional mechanisms, and promoting holistic ECD nationwide.



PAFEC and IMN will continue releasing new episodes of their podcast series, 'Transforming Society through Early Childhood Development.' New content will provide deeper insights, practical guidance, and expert perspectives in Early Childhood Development

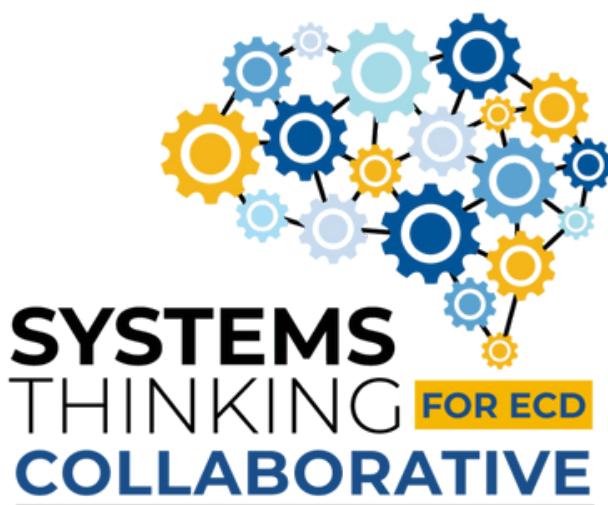
Data analytics indicate that over 73 million people across Pakistan have engaged with the podcast series, representing nearly one-third of the country's total population. This scale of engagement underscores the remarkable reach and influence of the series and highlights the power of digital media in bringing Early Childhood Development (ECD) into mainstream public discourse.

Most importantly, the podcast has introduced ECD concepts in communities and spaces where these discussions were previously limited or absent—helping to challenge misconceptions, raise awareness, and build understanding around the critical importance of early childhood for lifelong outcomes. By translating complex ECD concepts into accessible, relatable conversations, the series has informed diverse audiences of the growing relevance and urgency of investing in early childhood. Building on this momentum, new episodes will continue to deepen engagement, address emerging gaps, and present innovative perspectives, ensuring the podcast remains a trusted platform for learning, dialogue, and awareness while supporting the growth of an informed and engaged ECD community nationwide.



PAFEC has joined a country-level consortium alongside the Aga Khan University (AKU) ECD PREP, ITA, and NSCoEn, to apply for ECDAN's Short Course on Strengthening Childcare Systems, titled "Systems Thinking for Childcare: A Short Course on Using and Adapting the Childcare Systems Map."

If selected, this four-month interactive course will introduce participants to the principles of systems thinking for ECD and demonstrate how these concepts can be applied through the Childcare Systems Map, enabling PAFEC and its partners to strengthen advocacy, inform policy, and guide programme priorities for equitable, high-quality childcare. As part of this consortium, PAFEC and its partners will contribute to completing assignments, obtaining certification, and collaboratively developing a national strategy for childcare systems mapping.





As part of future engagement, PAFEC, in collaboration with Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), plans to implement a Parenting Education Programme in 2026.

Both parties are united by common interests and objectives and will establish channels of communication and cooperation to promote holistic Early Childhood Development (ECD) through parental education programmes. The collaboration will enable the effective use of each other's expertise and resources to develop relevant programmes, courses, training materials, and delivery systems in line with ECD sector needs. Both organisations will also utilize their official social media platforms to share approved content and infographics to raise awareness on ECD and promote joint initiatives.

PAFEC will organize training workshops on AIOU premises and deliver virtual programmes through the Learning Management System of BF Technologies to support students' employability and social development, while ensuring the provision of technical trainers for most sessions. Both parties will collaborate in conducting seminars, training workshops, webinars, podcasts, and internships. Additionally, PAFEC, with technical support from AIOU, will design, develop, and regularly update curricula for programmes, diplomas, and short courses to meet evolving ECD sector requirements.



Principles of the Trehaus Method

pedagogy

centres around playful experiences and driving inquiry to inform play and project-based approaches

child-centred

embraces and celebrates the individuality of each child

PAFEC will carry forward its Webinar Series in 2026, building on the extraordinary reach and visibility achieved through its previous episodes.

Across seven sessions, the series engaged over 700 participants live on Zoom and reached more than 35,000 views across social media platforms, including post-event uploads and short-form reels. These figures reflect not only the wide audience attracted to the webinars but also the sustained interest and engagement from diverse stakeholders, including practitioners, parents, educators, and policymakers, across the country.

The series has proven to be an invaluable platform for knowledge sharing, professional development, and multi-stakeholder dialogue on priority issues in early childhood development. It provides participants with access to expert-led discussions, practical guidance, and evidence-based strategies, helping to strengthen ECD practices at both the household and institutional levels. By continuing the webinar series in 2025, PAFEC will further expand its reach, reinforce learning outcomes, and maintain its position as a leading platform for advancing awareness, capacity building, and informed discussion on key themes in early childhood development nationwide.



A key prospect for 2025 is the launch of the 6th Online Certification Course in Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the first half of the year.

The course has generated significant interest, with numerous individuals and institutions reaching out to inquire about registrations, reflecting the growing recognition of the need for quality professional development in the ECD sector. PAFEC is in continual discussions with experienced trainers and partner organisations to expedite preparations and ensure the delivery of a high-quality, holistic learning experience that equips participants with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills for ECD.

In line with this, the course outline will be carefully designed and revised to meet the evolving demands of Pakistan's ECD landscape, incorporating the latest research, sectoral priorities, and feedback from previous cohorts. Through these efforts, PAFEC seeks not only to provide professional certification but also to strengthen the overall capacity of the ECD workforce, foster innovation, and contribute to improving outcomes for children across the country.

Our social links:



Compiled and Designed by
Wania Waseem
Manager Communication & Outreach
PAFEC

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Islamabad
T 051 8730495