INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

A Small Price to Pay

What the Ahlan Simsim initiative tells us about the costs of delivering early childhood development programs to crisis-affected children

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CONTENTS

Authors

Elana Banin, Athena Haywood, Kayla Hoyer, Lisa Långberg, Heidi Rosbe, Marianne Stone, with contributions from Chantale Kallas, Katie Murphy, Maria del Sol Prieto Bayona, Rebecca Samaha, and Phoebe Sloane.

Acknowledgments

Partnership is foundational to Ahlan Simsim. Ahlan Simsim was launched in 2018 by Sesame Workshop and the IRC, with Global TIES for Children at New York University as our external evaluation partner. The Global TIES for Children impact evaluation included a cost effectiveness study, conducted by the Center for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education at University of Pennsylvania and the IRC's Best Use of Resources team. An IRC-led analysis of the cost to the IRC as implementing partner is the focus of this brief.

For more information, please contact ahlan.simsim@rescue.org and costanalysis@rescue.org.

Overview: The Cost of Early Childhood Development

Early childhood is a time of unparalleled growth. The brain develops more rapidly in the first five years than at any other stage of life. Children's experiences during this critical window lay the foundation for their lifelong health, well-being, and success. However, in conflict and crisis-affected regions, this crucial period is often disrupted by adversity. This can have severe long-term consequences for a child's development. Providing early childhood development (ECD) in challenging contexts is not just beneficial—it is essential.

Studies show that, despite growing evidence supporting the positive impact of ECD programs on childhood outcomes, there is little research on how ECD can be delivered in cost-efficient and cost-effective ways.[1] There is even less information on strategies for cost-efficient investment in systems for scale and sustainability, particularly in areas affected by conflict and crisis. To begin addressing the cost evidence gap, this report reflects on the IRC's investments under the Ahlan Simsim initiative.

1. Cost-efficiency refers to the cost per output. For example, the cost per child reached or the cost per caregiver reached by an ECD program.
2. Cost-effectiveness refers to the cost per research outcome. For example, cost per change in literacy or numeracy scores per child, directly caused by the researched intervention.

ABOUT AHLAN SIMSIM

In 2018, Sesame Workshop and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) launched Ahlan Simsim ("Welcome Sesame" in Arabic) – the largest ECD initiative in the history of humanitarian response – to support children in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria to learn, grow, and thrive. With funding from the MacArthur and LEGO Foundations, Ahlan Simsim combined ECD programs and services for children and caregivers with educational media – including Sesame Workshop's Arabic-language TV show, also titled *Ahlan Simsim*.

Aspiring for access, quality, and scale, Ahlan Simsim's programs were delivered by IRC teams and local civil society organizations, and in partnership with government ministries. Ahlan Simsim sought to meet the immediate needs of young children, and design interventions with long-term sustainability. Program examples include preschool programs, parenting support, and the integration of ECD guidance into primary healthcare.

The IRC collected data from 2018 to 2023 on what it costs to deliver and scale quality ECD programs. We analyzed the costs of programs delivered by IRC and local NGO partners, drawing on 19 cost-efficiency data points for four distinct ECD programs, including rigorous cost-effectiveness data for two programs. We also reviewed financial data on investment in working within formal government systems to embed and scale ECD interventions, based on 14 distinct partnerships with systems actors across four contexts.

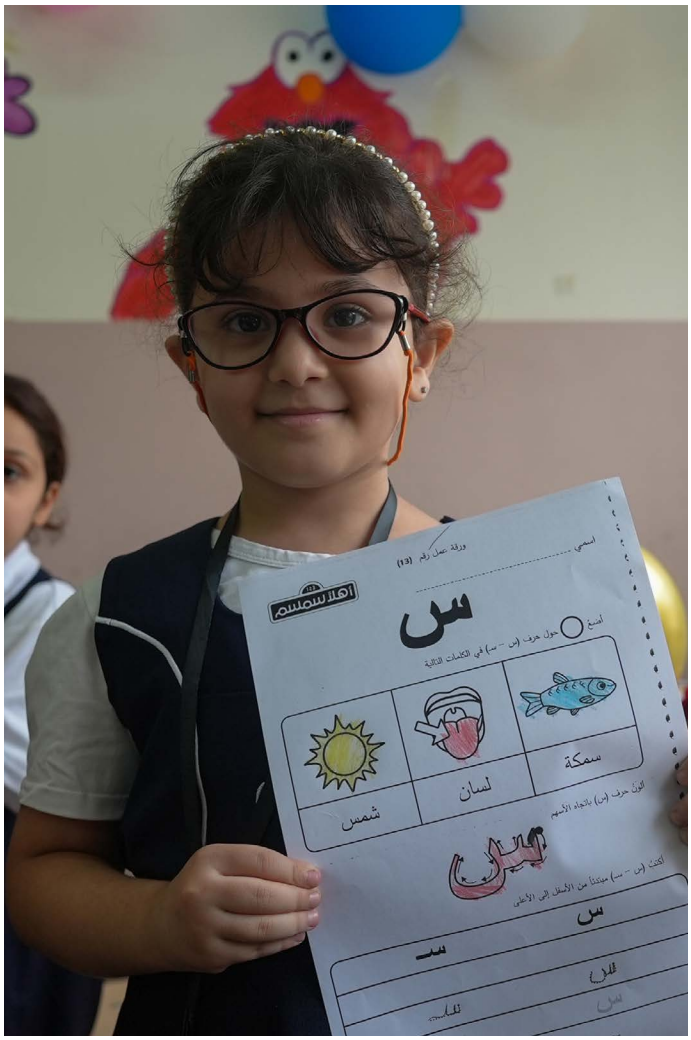
Cost analyses of Ahlan Simsim programs illustrate that ECD can be delivered in cost-effective and cost-efficient ways. This analysis represents an important contribution to foreign assistance data globally. It can also start a conversation around the potential for scale and the power of systems-level investments as ways to support quality ECD interventions.

In this report, we highlight:

1. How smart, intentional investments can be deployed across a range of settings and program models, with trade-offs depending on desired outcomes.

2. Exploration of cost-effectiveness of the Remote Early Learning and the Remote Reach Up and Learn programs.

3. What investment looks like for sustainable, systems-led change.



Key Findings

Smart, Intentional Investments Deployed Across a Range of Settings and Models

Four distinct Ahlan Simsim program models delivered to children and caregivers by the IRC and local NGO[2] partners **cost $10-$578 per child** in programs across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. The range of cost-efficiencies was driven by delivery modality, location, implementor, and reach.

Our findings show that cost-efficiency is at risk when scale is not weighted in financing considerations, allowing limited dollars to be stretched further. Our data indicates that humanitarian response implementors should—when conditions and contexts allow—**aim for a minimum reach threshold of at least 1,000 children** per cohort when designing ECD programs to be cost-efficient.

Analysis of the remote/hybrid versus in-person programming costs demonstrated that reach, as opposed to delivery modality, was the most effective predictor of cost savings. However, having more than one way to receive information gives clients a broader choice range and expands program access for harder-to-reach areas.

What Investment Looks Like for Sustainable, Systems-Led Change

Reach is not the only financial consideration when designing programs for scale. Quantitative analysis of 14 distinct partnerships with systems actors across four contexts demonstrated that it is often the **early stage 'invisible investments'** that rely on understanding the context, building relationships, creating a stronger enabling environment, and co-creation that **allow cost-efficiencies to be achieved.**

For example, a successful **partnership with the Ministry of Education in Iraq** led to the integration of a two-week school readiness program into Grade 1 classrooms across Federal Iraq. By the start of the 2023-24 school year, the program was running in half of all primary schools, such that the cumulative investment by the IRC was less than **$1.50/child. By 2025, we project the IRC investment per child to drop to less than $0.50** as the program sustains and the number of children reached continues to rise.

Cost-effectiveness of the Remote Early Learning and Reach Up and Learn Programs

According to the World Bank (2020), the cost of preschool in Lebanon is estimated at $802 per refugee pupil. In contrast, the Remote Early Learning Program (RELP), based on its implementation in Lebanon, is projected to cost **$150 per child when serving 1,000 or more children.** This makes RELP a **highly cost-effective solution for marginalized children who would otherwise lack access to education.**

At $150 per child, the cost for RELP is **minimal when compared to the global societal costs of the learning crisis,** which UNESCO estimates will reach **$10 trillion by 2030** due to children lacking basic education and social-emotional skills. Against this dire prediction, early childhood and preprimary solutions like RELP are not just beneficial—they are a **social and economic imperative.**

However, the quality and contextualization of ECD programs are critical to their impact. For examplewhen the Reach Up and Learn (RUL) program was adapted for remote delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person home visits characterizing previous versions of the intervention were eliminated. This adapted version of RUL did not show positive impacts on child development and therefore was not cost-effective.

Key takeaway: It is vital to balance cost decisions with an analysis of which program approaches are best suited to meet the needs of the most vulnerable or marginalized children in a given context. Considering the diminishing amount of already thinly spread humanitarian aid, it is critical to note that the cheapest programs are not always the best at achieving results.

2. Local NGO costs in this analysis are organizations that received sub-award financing from the IRC to deliver programming.

Methodology

This brief consolidates two distinct methods of cost analysis across Ahlan Simsim ECD programs.

The IRC's Best Use of Resources (BUR) team employs an ingredients-level cost analysis methodology, incorporating monitoring data, financial data, and time and effort allocations to accurately determine the cost of a program or activity. This approach is utilized for both cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness analyses, with the latter involving more rigorous data collection and quality checks to ensure high-integrity results that complement rigorously evaluated impact data. Program teams assist BUR in understanding resource usage across all concurrently funded programs and activities, enabling an accurate total cost and ingredients list for each analysis.

Analysis of IRC's financial investment in systems-level work was done by the IRC's Ahlan Simsim project team, who employed a narrative financial analysis approach. This involved a retrospective examination of financial data for annual spending in each country on scaling partnerships with system actors. We layered this on top of the financial investment data to explore where and how investments were allocated over time, and how this related to the success or forward movement of an intervention to scale and embed within a system.

To develop content over 6 years across 4 contexts in MENA, the IRC spent pent approximately 4 million dollars or roughly 6% of IRC's total Ahlan Simsim investment. Sesame Workshop also spent considerable resources on media content development. These are necessary upfront costs for consideration within program design, however, this brief is focused on the cost of implementation and **does not include content development in the analysis.**

It is also important to acknowledge the importance of unpaid caregiver time allocated to implementing these programs with their children. These costs are also not calculated in our findings. More information on calculating caregiver time spent and associated costs is available in the RELP research study.

AHLAN SIMSIM PROGRAMS

The 19 cost-efficiency data points that are used to analyze cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness draw cost data from four of Ahlan Simsim's programs:[3] the Remote Early Learning Program, Ahlan Simsim Families, Reach Up and Learn, and Remote (phone-based) Reach Up and Learn.

> The **Remote Early Learning Program (RELP)** is an 11-week preschool program designed to reach 5-6-year-old children who do not have access to preschool. Teachers meet with groups of parents over WhatsApp three times a week to guide parents through activities to do with their children.

> **Ahlan Simsim Families (ASF)** is a highly adaptable program that targets caregivers of children aged 0-8, in informal spaces. Caregiver groups are provided tips on a variety of topics related to their child's development, play, and parenting. Messages are also sent to caregivers with tools and activities for follow-up. This program can be delivered in-person, remotely, or in a hybrid model combining in-person and remote.

> **Reach Up and Learn (RUL)** is a play-based home visiting program that targets caregivers of children ages 6 months to 3.5 years, originally designed for and implemented in Jamaica. IRC has implemented this program delivered by community health workers who visit caregivers in their homes with a dosage that ranges from 12-14 contact hours over 6-12 months.

> **Remote Reach Up and Learn (R-RUL)** is an adaptation of the RUL program for remote audio-only delivery by phone. It was developed by IRC in response to COVID. Community health workers integrated approximately 7 minutes of ECD tips into 30-minute health-focused calls delivered three times per month for six months.

3. These models do not represent the entirety of the Ahlan Simsim portfolio of programs; the four listed are those for which cost-efficiency analyses were conducted.

Cost-Efficiency Across ECD Models

Cost-efficiency is essential for designing and planning programs that aim to balance impact with available resources. Ahlan Simsim is a collection of flexible programs calibrated to need, access, and context. As such, there are purposeful differences in cycle length, dosage, and delivery modality with varying costs between and within program models.

Overall, ECD programs delivered to children and caregivers by the IRC and local NGO[5] partners cost between $10 and $578 per child in programs across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. The dosage ranges between 4-19 contact hours with a child or caregiver.[4]

Cost-efficiency analyses encourage us to ask: *How much would it cost per child if we delivered this service in different ways? How does each program balance cost with quality and contextual relevance?*

Our analysis of 19 cost-efficiency data points across four program models identified **five key factors** that influenced program implementation costs:[6]

Delivery modality
In-person, remote, and hybrid implementation.

Implementer[8]
The entity that delivers the program.

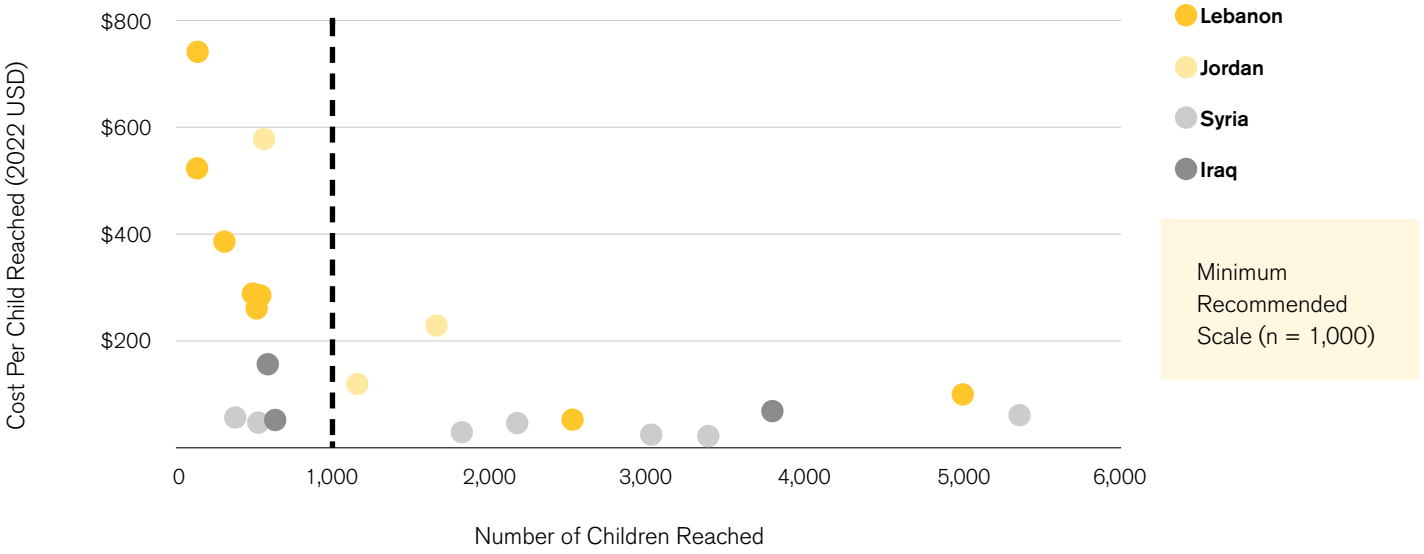
Reach
The total number of clients who receive the program.

Cycle length
The number of weeks in a program model determines the overall cycle length and directly influences how many cycles can be executed within a given period.

Location
Local cost differentials and market rates are affected by where a program is delivered.[7]

4. For details on Ahlan Simsim program models included in the cost range, see table in Appendices A and B.
5. Local NGO costs in this analysis refers costs incurred by organizations that received sub-award financing from the IRC to deliver programming.
6. A "cost driver" is a resource or contextual factor that is a significant contributor to the cost of the program and is therefore "driving the cost" of the program.
7. Location data was only analyzed for differences between countries. In this instance Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria.
8. Data evaluating cost differentials between the IRC and local partners is only available for ECD programming in Syria. While we did not have sufficient data to draw wider conclusions, data indicates in some cases cost per child is less when delivered with local partners, however numerous factors affect this finding, and we recommend further exploration.

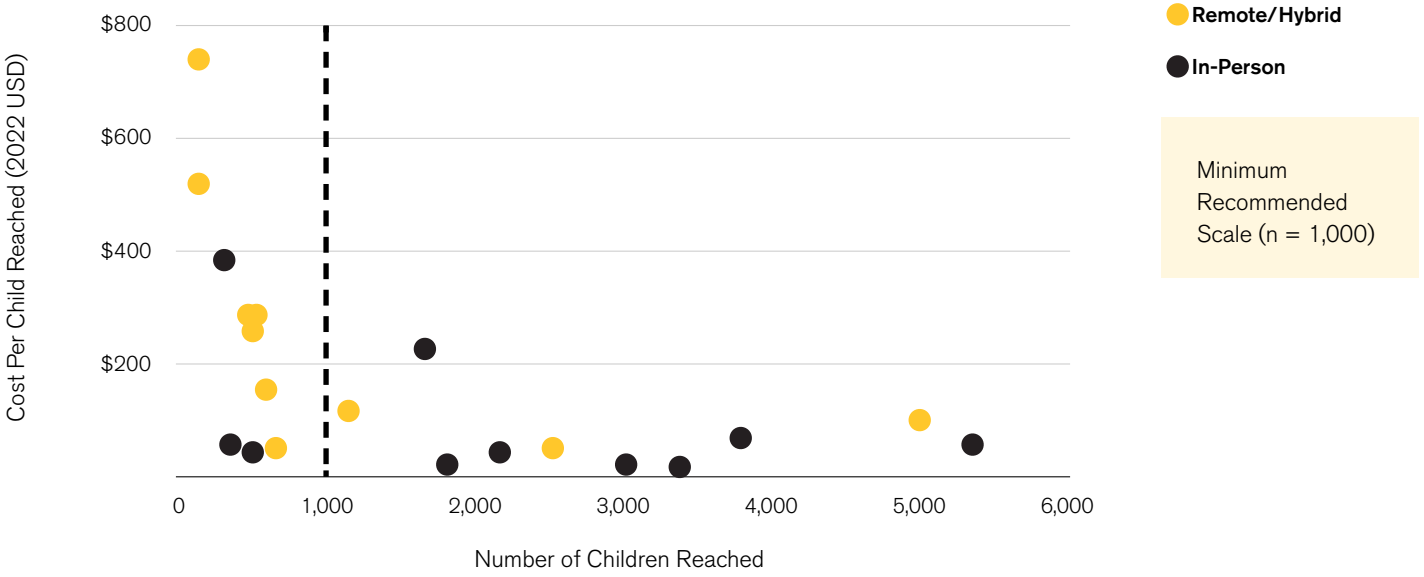
FIGURE 1: AHLAN SIMSIM ECD PROGRAM COST PER CHILD



Analysis of 4 program models across 4 contexts demonstrate that cost per child varied from $10-$578. Our findings show that cost efficiency is at risk when less than 1,000 children were reached

Note: The outlier data point of $740 was not included in the cost range of Ahlan Simsim programs as it is an anomaly due to the small scale of implementation. See Appendix B for details.

FIGURE 2: REMOTE/HYBRID VS. IN-PERSON ECD DELIVERY

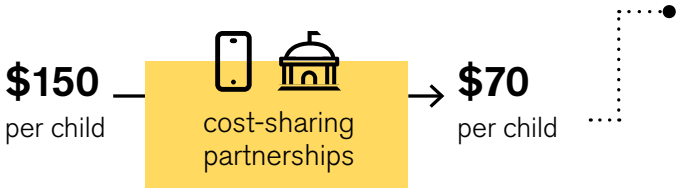


Analysis of the remote/hybrid versus in-person programming costs demonstrated that delivery modality was not an effective predictor of cost savings. The most significant predictor was reach.

Note: Costs analyzed in this brief only include those incurred by IRC and exclude costs to Sesame Workshop to produce media content, as well as costs to scaling partners such as government ministries.

MAXIMIZING EFFICIENCIES FOR SCALE

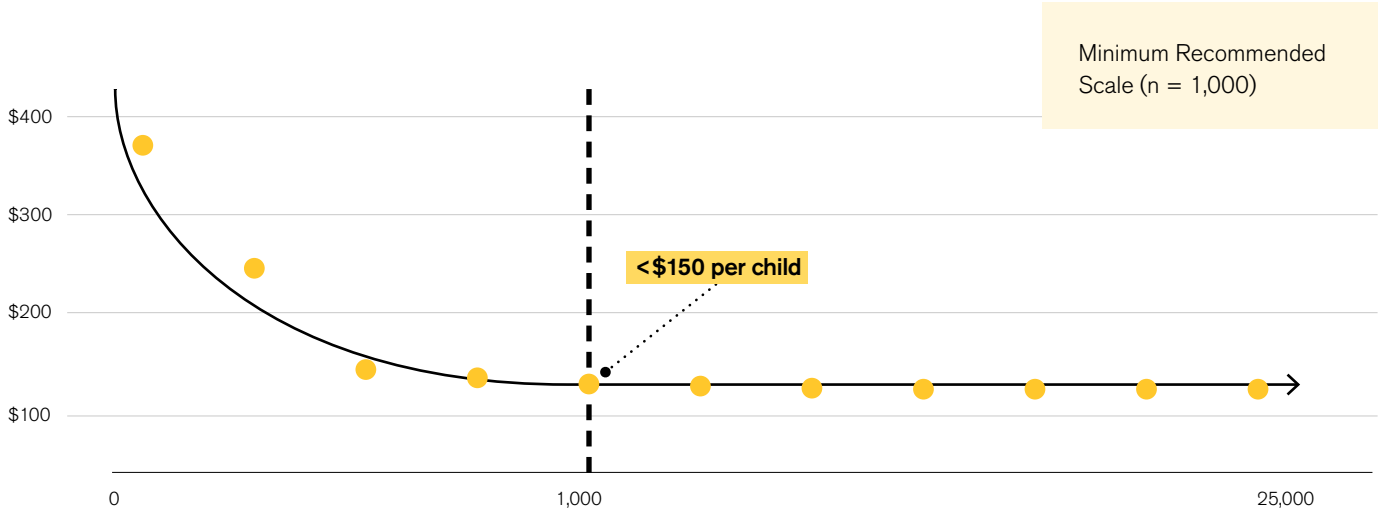
The Remote Early Learning Program (RELP) cost $260 per child for the 11-week program when delivered to 514 children included in the research study. However, if expanded to reach 1,000 or more children per implementation round as has been deemed feasible by the IRC's Lebanon team, the cost per child could drop 43%.[9,10] This brings the cost of RELP down to around **$150 per child.**



Future cost-efficiency considerations for RELP: The IRC looked at the largest cost categories that drove the cost of large-scale implementation: teacher salaries, ECD materials kits, and recharging internet or phone cards. These costs could be reduced through cost-sharing partnership approaches to the IRC.

For example, if 100% of teacher salaries were covered by the government and 100% of the internet recharge cards were provided free of charge by telecom companies, we could see a further decrease of 50% per child, resulting in a $70 cost per child.

FIGURE 3: MINIMUM RECOMMENDED SCALE



The projected cost of delivering RELP at a scale of 1,000 children or more demonstrates that the cost levels off at less than $150 per child.

9. RELP focused specifically on children who had not previously attended any Early Childhood Education programming. Future iterations would be more cost-efficient if they aimed to reach more children and caregivers in each community before scaling to additional areas.
10. These costs assume continued delivery by INGOs such as the IRC, rather than a national systems actor or government scaling approach. For investment analysis of scaling with national systems, see the section below titled 'Investment within Systems for Scale & Sustainability'

Our analysis indicates four broad findings about the cost-efficiency of Ahlan Simsim ECD programming:

1. **People matter:** ECD programs require dedicated individuals with the necessary expertise. Staff and their training were the primary or secondary drivers of cost across all programs. The total program cost proportion allocated to national staff ranged from approximately 25% to 75% (see Appendix A).[11]

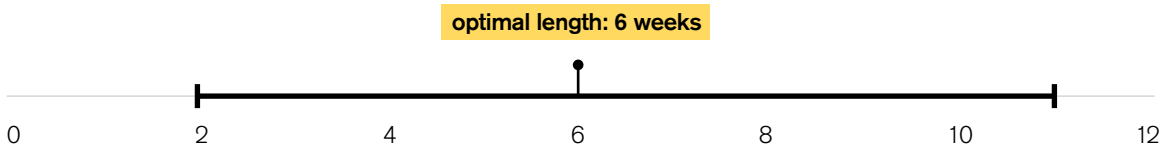
2. **Returns to scale:** The greatest variation in costs per child was observed for programs reaching less than 1,000 children. After this threshold, the cost per child "leveled off" at around $100 for the bulk of Ahlan Simsim's program models, regardless of factors such as delivery modality, cycle length, and location (see Figure 1). As such, reaching at least 1,000 children helps implementation teams make the most of their resources and become more cost-efficient.[12] This is an important finding as humanitarian response is often geared toward short-term, direct service approaches, limiting dollars to be stretched further.

3. **Program cycles:** Analysis of the Ahlan Simsim Families caregiver program shows that an optimal combination of cost, time, and outcomes was seen with 6-week program cycles. While total program hours delivered to caregivers were similar across iterations of ASF, program implementation can be designed to run anywhere from 2 to 11 weeks with varied hours per session. When analyzing data on cost, outcomes, and quality, the results indicate that a 6-week cycle provided the most cost-effective programming without compromising outcomes. Cycles implementing the same number of hours over periods longer than six weeks saw no increase in outcomes but higher running costs. While cycles under six weeks are operationally feasible,[13] it is crucial to thoroughly consider factors including client time commitment, service quality, intervention dosage, and expected outcomes.

4. **Maximize delivery modalities:** Remote versus in-person delivery does not show significant differences in cost (see Figure 2). Remote and in-person versions of a program can leverage the same frameworks and teams. When implemented in the same location, in-person and remote program modalities can be paired to maximize efficiency. Having more than one way to receive information gives clients a broader choice range and expands program access for harder-to-reach areas.

Remote Programming – Cost and Quality: Monitoring and impact data tell us that maintaining high-quality is possible when remote programming is designed appropriately. Remote programming has a great potential to expand access.

FIGURE 4: AHLAN SIMSIM FAMILIES PROGRAM CYCLE



The Ahlan Simsim Families program can be designed to run for a range of cycle lengths. Analysis indicated that 6 weeks is the optimal program cycle length for cost-effective programming without compromising outcomes.

11. ECD programming in the MENA region heavily relies on non-staff personnel to implement programs because, in many contexts, refugees are not legally permitted to earn more than a daily stipend for their work. These cost implications should be considered if taken to other regions.
12. Minimum scale recommendations are intended for contexts in which scale of reach can be planned. They may not be applicable emergency response contexts where planning is less predictable.
13. In instances of displacement where families may only be available for a certain amount of time or specific convening opportunities that leverage o`ther interventions, shorter cycles are a viable option. Design considerations should include what is needed for the training of facilitators and how sessions and dosage can be optimized to ensure sufficient exposure hours without unduly taxing the time of caregivers.

Cost-Effectiveness

While we do not have causal impact evaluation data for all Ahlan Simsim programs, we do have cost-effectiveness data for RELP and Remote RUL. The New York University Global TIES for Children (NYU-TIES) team led impact evaluations of both programs in collaboration with IRC and Sesame Workshop research teams.[14]

Each of these studies also looked at the program's cost-effectiveness, conducted by the Center for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and IRC's Best Use of Resources team. This allows us to conclude how to maximize impact per dollar spent when designing ECD programs.

Cost-effectiveness analyses encourage us to ask: *Given the known cost in comparison to other effective models, is this program likely to be the best use of resources to deliver this outcome?*

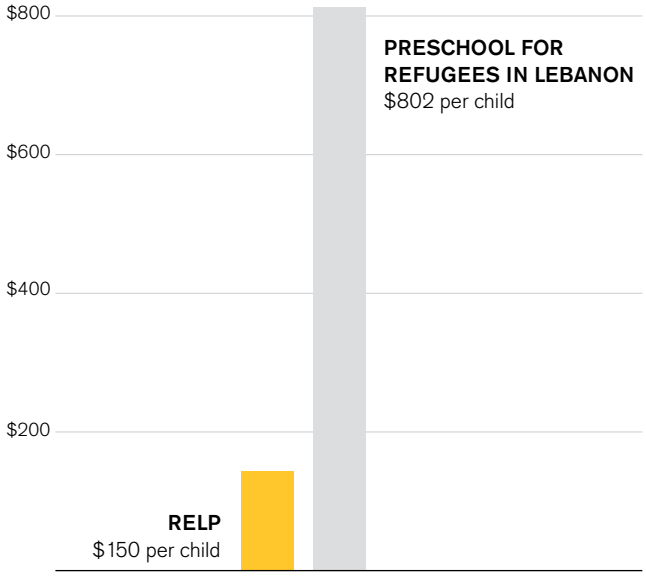
REMOTE EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM: A COST-EFFECTIVE REMOTE MODEL

An impact evaluation of the RELP program, delivered to Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, measured the impact of the remote preschool intervention on child development along with parenting outcomes. Teachers employed by the IRC called small groups of parents of children ages 5-6 three times a week (via WhatsApp) for 11 weeks.

The sessions equipped parents with playful educational activities to do with their child to support emergent literacy and numeracy, social-emotional skills, and motor skills. The teachers also provided parents with links to Ahlan Simsim educational media resources such as videos, storybooks, and songs. Children received packages of worksheets, storybooks, and art materials, and caregivers received pre-paid internet bundles to facilitate their participation.

The impact evaluation conducted on the 11-week RELP showed that the program produced child learning outcomes across domains of emergent numeracy, literacy and social-emotional skills comparable to those seen in global studies of a year of in-person preschool. This included outcomes on emergent numeracy and literacy, social-emotional development, motor skills, and child play.

FIGURE 5: COST PER CHILD COMPARISON



In Lebanon, we compared a cost of $150 per child (the projected cost of implementing RELP when scaled to 1,000 or more children) to current estimates of government investment in early childhood education. As of 2022, Lebanon's investment is estimated at approximately $60 per child enrolled annually.[15] However, there are several additional factors to take into consideration including consecutive annual cuts to the Lebanon Department of Education, supplemental funding from donors, the quality of programming delivered, the rate of teacher salaries, and access for displaced populations. As such, it is difficult to

14. Overall summary of key findings from impact evaluations and cost analyses here. More detailed information about the evaluations and the cost analyses available here.
15. This was calculated using 2022 demographic data from the Lebanon Central Administration of Statistics to estimate the number of enrolled preschool children and the 2022 Lebanon Education budget to estimate the cost per child spent by the Lebanon government on early childhood education.

FUTURE-FACING EXPENSES BY 2030 DUE TO SKILL DEFICIT

$625 billion
in the Arab region

$10 trillion
globally

assess a 1:1 cost-effectiveness comparison for Lebanese preschools based on the available national data. However, In 2020, the World Bank estimated that annual public preschool cost is $802 in Lebanon per refugee pupil.

In Lebanon—where nine out of ten refugee households live in extreme poverty and host community children similarly bear the brunt of social and economic hardship—the research findings are a powerful indicator that RELP can offer a solution to children in hard-to-reach areas or when in-person school may not be feasible. Comparing to World Bank estimates of the cost of preschool, because RELP achieved comparable learning outcomes to a full year of in-school preschool and successfully reached crisis-affected children, in contexts like Lebanon it is considered a cost-effective approach.

As we look to the future, UNESCO found that by 2030, 74% of children in the Arab States will have skill deficits, with the potential to cost the region $625 billion per year. These predicted costs stem from lower incomes, reduced productivity, lower taxes, higher welfare transfers, and higher fiscal costs for the government. On the global stage, UNESCO estimates that the private, fiscal, and social costs of children leaving school early and not gaining basic skills will amount to $10 trillion per year. UNESCO also identifies low social-emotional skills as a determining factor in the reduction in GDP per capita, estimating that by 2030 the global deficit will be as high as $7.4 trillion.

In summary, the cost of inaction for the Middle East as well as the global community is exponentially higher than the cost of investing in learning and social-emotional skill building in early childhood.

REMOTE REACH UP AND LEARN (R-RUL): A *COST-INEFFECTIVE* REMOTE MODEL

A randomized controlled trial impact evaluation and a cost-effectiveness analysis were also conducted for a remote version of Reach Up and Learn (R-RUL) which was adapted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results did not record positive impacts on child development, the primary target outcome.

A potential reason for these results is dosage—with an average of 8 minutes spent on ECD per 30-minute health call in the R-RUL program likely being too low—as well as the audio-only delivery. Integration parts of the original in-person RUL program, such as activity demonstration, were redesigned due to the COVID-19 access constraints, giving further evidence to the importance of quality. The implementation cost was $110 per household for 18 half-hour phone calls delivered over 6 months (3 calls/month).

Given the results of the research, the IRC would not recommend replication of Ahlan Simsim's version of Remote RUL current design, and therefore we do not consider it cost-effective.[16] However, other remote adaptations of RUL may still be effective. For instance, a remote adaptation of RUL, which offered longer phone calls compared to the Ahlan Simsim version, and included print materials alongside WhatsApp and SMS messages, positively influenced certain caregiving practices in Jamaica. In addition, in-person versions of RUL have improved caregiving practices and child development in many contexts around the world, and although not yet tested in impact evaluations, we are seeing promising results from IRC impact evaluations from in-person RUL in Bangladesh, Syria, and Venezuela.

16. More information on the study from NYU's Global TIES for Children analysis can be found here.

Investment within Systems for Scale & Sustainability

Ahlan Simsim teams sought to respond to urgent needs while also working towards long-term impact. Aiming for scale and sustainability, we worked in partnership with local actors including ministries of education, health, and social development to co-design and embed ECD programs and services into national systems. As of July 2024, nearly 3 million children and caregivers had been reached with these partnerships.

Systems-level investments, embedded within ministerial budget lines, will help cement the long-term integration of ECD. Ahlan Simsim estimates that these sustaining interventions will continue to reach more than a million children annually without additional support from the Ahlan Simsim team. As a result, for successfully institutionalized interventions, our analysis indicates that systems-level investments for scale are cost-efficient for the IRC.

To explore what systems-level investment looks like, our teams analyzed the IRC investment into 14 distinct partnerships with systems actors across four contexts. Data analyzed in this section reflects only the IRC's investment and does not include incremental and ongoing costs to partners.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

Analysis of the IRC investment in Ahlan Simsim's partnerships with systems actors for scale and sustainability indicated the importance of "invisible investment". This investment in staff time and activities in the early phase of partnership focused on understanding the context and system, building relationships with stakeholders, and co-developing program interventions with partners. We use the term "invisible" since tangible outputs, in the form of children reached or outcomes achieved, were not generated until later in each partnership.

However, the "invisible investments" proved vital in the long term, laying groundwork for successful scale and sustainability of interventions. For example, for the intervention depicted in Figures 6 and 7, while the intervention did not start to reach children until fall of 2021 when it was piloted at the start of the 2021-22 school year, significant investment was made in 2020 and the early part of 2021. For Ahlan Simsim, nearly half of the total investment with systems actors went to these foundational activities to lay critical groundwork for later scaling.

The IRC investment also acted like "seed funding," enabling interventions to start with small-scale pilot programs. These pilots resulted in learning and reflection that led to critical adjustments and adaptations to content and delivery. The learning and reflection also produced evidence that was important in gaining buy-in from key decision-makers within government ministries to support expansion as interventions began to scale up.

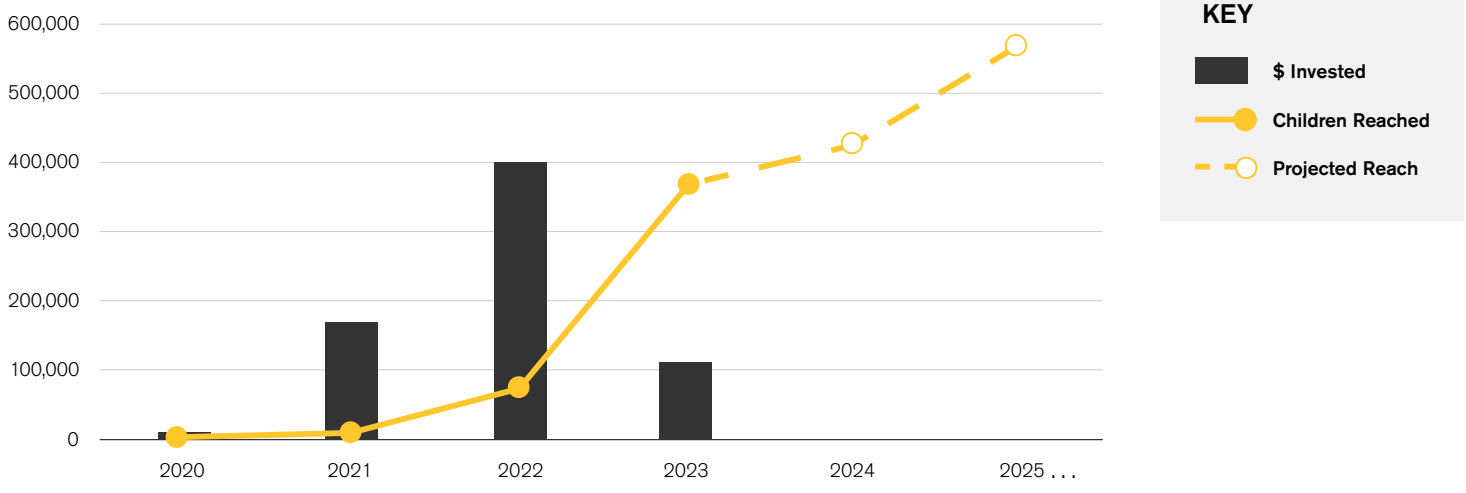
Iraq case study: In partnership with the Ministry of Education, Ahlan Simsim teams co-designed, piloted, and expanded a school readiness program. As of the 2023-24 school year, the program ran in nearly half of all primary schools in Federal Iraq, integrated into the Grade 1 curriculum, and the Ministry of Education is committed to scaling the program nationwide.

The IRC did not invest additional funds beyond 2023, and the program continues to scale up, fully owned by the Ministry. Figure 7 illustrates how the IRC investment per child decreases over time as the program continues to scale up through ongoing implementation. Over 2020-2023, the cumulative investment by IRC in this program through end of 2023 had reached a cumulative total of470,000 children, has amounted to less than $1.50/child. Based on projections of scale trajectory, by 2025 we anticipate the IRC investment per child will reduce to less than $0.50.

While per-child investments by IRC varied by program intervention (see Appendix C), for other partnerships where interventions were fully integrated into national systems and institutionalized for long-term sustaining scale, we see similar patterns over time.

School Readiness with Iraq's Ministry of Education

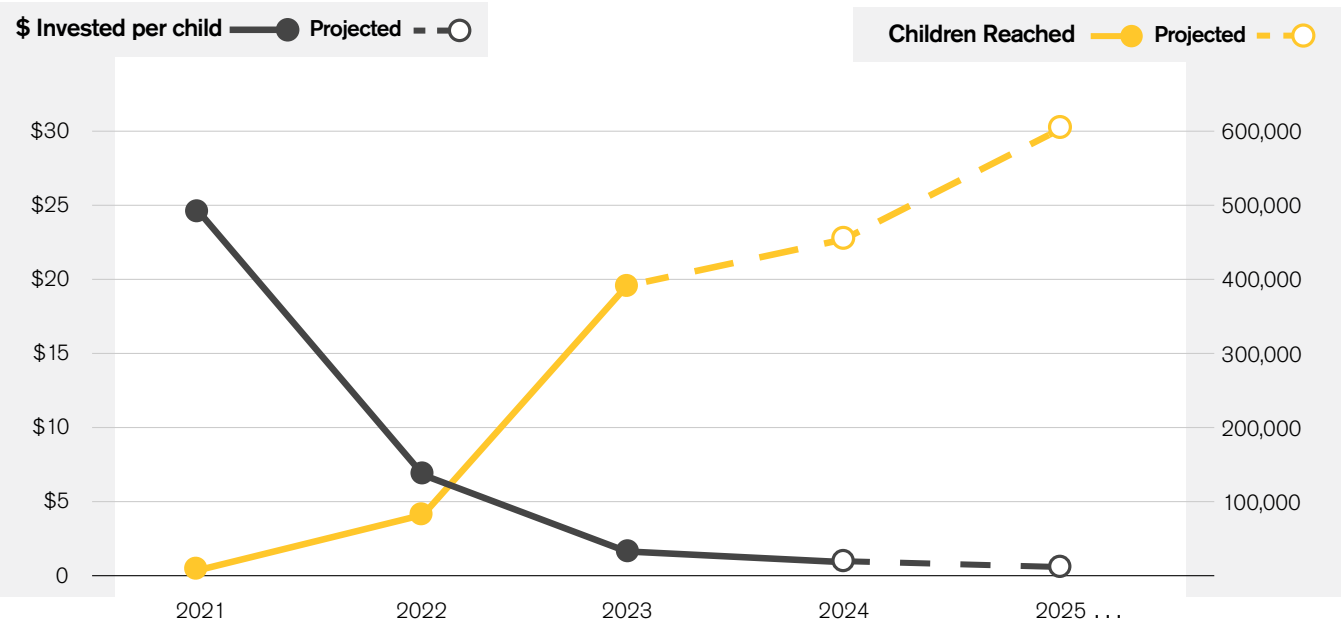
FIGURE 6: ANNUAL INVESTMENT VS REACH PROJECTED INTO 2025



IRC's "invisible investment" peaks before program expansion in late 2022 and tapers off in 2023 when the program scaled up, with ownership over the intervention and all ongoing implementation costs.

School Readiness with Iraq's Ministry of Education

FIGURE 7: IRC'S INVESTMENT PER CHILD VS REACH PROJECTED INTO 2025



As reach increases over time, the cumulative IRC investment per child decreases. Depicted is the total cumulative investment by IRC, compared to the total number of children reached, up to a given point in time.

Conclusion

The Ahlan Simsim initiative provides crucial insights into the costs of delivering early childhood development programs in crisis-affected regions. Learnings from this brief highlight the critical balance between cost efficiency, scale, and quality. Strategic investments in programs depend on reaching sufficient numbers of children to optimize resources while ensuring that quality is not compromised. Further, investment in systems actors can be cost-efficient. Allocating early-stage resourcing to partnerships is essential for creating the right conditions for long-term impact. The cost-effectiveness analysis further demonstrates the importance of understanding what works, for whom, and at what cost, particularly for the most vulnerable, where research findings are limited. Resources must be allocated effectively when the stakes are so high. As we move forward, these insights can guide the design and implementation of sustainable and impactful early childhood interventions globally.

Note: Analysis of the investment is based exclusively on IRC's financial investment in working with these systems partners and does not reflect costs to scaling partners such as government ministries. Analysis therefore does not speak to the ongoing incremental cost of each program intervention.

APPENDIX A: DIRECT SERVICE DELIVERY PROGRAM COST DATA (2022 USD)

	Remote Early Learning Program Analysis File RELP CEA Brief Journal Article	**Ahlan Simsim Families**	**In-person Reach Up and Learn**	**Remote Reach Up and Learn** Analysis File (2021 USD)
Key attributes/ description	Facilitators target children via their caregivers on WhatsApp, who then conduct activities with child at home	Group sessions providing caregivers with knowledge of key ECD concepts and help them develop practices supporting their child's healthy development	Home visits focusing on play and building caregiver self-confidence in having more interactions with their child positively and playfully	Remote, phone-based module adapted from in-person RUL due to COVID-19
Modality	Remote	Remote, Hybrid, In-person	In-person	Remote
Dosage	3 calls/week, 11 weeks	Ranges from 2 to 11 weeks with sessions between 45 minutes and 1.75 hours; and an average 13 contact hours	Weekly/bi-weekly home visits	2 calls/month lasting 7-10 minutess, across 6 months
Cost per child (2022 USD)	$260	$10-$520	Lebanon: $385 Jordan: $225-$577	$118
Cost drivers (% of total spending)	Materials, activities (17%) Educators (12%)	Educators and national staff (25-75%)	Educators (15- 38%)	Educators (26%)
Outcomes	Very positive 45 effect size for + impact on child development (Source: impact evaluation data)	Positive In-person: Over 90% of caregivers met outcome target for developmentally supportive activities in most cases. Lower for 2 models (50-70%) Remote: 76-79% of caregivers met outcome targets after AS Families	Mixed Low to medium contribution to improved child development (0.16-0.30 effect size) (Source: monitoring data)	No impact on child development (Source: impact evaluation data)

17. Dosage too low, resulting in a negligible impact.

APPENDIX B: DISAGGREGATED COST-EFFICIENCY DATA

Cost Ahlan Simsim ECD Data Set (2022 USD)

Program	Number of Children	Cost per Child	Number of Caregivers	Cost per Caregiver
Remote Early Learning Program - (IRC only)				
Lebanon RELP Wave 1	514	$260		
Lebanon RELP Wave 2	147	$740		
Lebanon RELP Scale Projection (modeled)	2,000	$140		
Iraq RELP	601	$153		
Ahlan Simsim Families - (Partner NGO or IRC as indicated)				
Northeast Syria Ashti	3,025	$14	1,652	$25
Northeast Syria Ashna	3,386	$10	1,367	$24
Northwest Syria SRD	1,824	$17	1,004	$32
Northwest Syria UOSSM	388	$52	209	$96
Northwest Syria Watan	533	$42	288	$78
Northeast Syria IRC	5,359	$56	2,830	$106
Northwest Syria IRC	2,173	$42	973	$95
Lebanon Remote IRC	2,352	$50	1,036	$123
Lebanon Hybrid IRC	532	$284	242	$625
Iraq In-Person IRC	3,791	$68	2,186	$119
Iraq Remote IRC	645	$47	433	$69
Remote (phone-based) Reach Up & Learn - (IRC only)				
Remote Reach Up & Learn	1,157	$116	1,157	$116
Reach Up & Learn (RUL) - (IRC only)				
In-Person RUL – Education	320	$385	320	$385
In-Person RUL – Health	1,669	$225	1,669	$225
In-Person RUL – Child Protection	572	$577	572	$577

APPENDIX C: SUMMARY OF DATA FOR SYSTEMS-LEVEL INVESTMENT

Country	Sector	Partner	Total IRC investment (2018-2023)	Cumulative investment per child by end of 2021	Cumulative investment per child by end of 2022	Cumulative investment per child by end of 2023	Cumulative reach as of July 2024	Investment per child as of July 2024	% Change in cost over time
Iraq	Education	MoE	$ 669K	$ 25	$ 6.83	$ 1.42	470,067	$ 1.42	94%
Iraq	Health	MoH	$ 301K		$ 18	$ 1.31	230,625	$ 1.31	93%
Iraq	Social Development	CWC	$ 89K				0		
Jordan	Education	MoE	$ 885K	$ 1.32	$ 2.05	$ 1.38	643,471	$ 1.38	-4%
Jordan	Health	MoH	$ 544K		$ 4.97	$ 0.67	970,652	$ 0.56	89%
Jordan	Social Development	NCFA-MoSA	$ 538K		$ 285	$ 145	3,700	$ 145	49%
Jordan	Social Development	Zaha	$ 385K	$ 21			17,941	$ 21	0%
Jordan	Social Development	CBOs	$ 439K	$ 28	$ 39	$ 49	9,022	$ 49	-73%
Lebanon	Education	MEHE	$ 80K			$ 1.02	78,543	$ 1.02	
Lebanon	Health	MoPH	$ 498K			$ 35	14,397	$ 35	
Lebanon	Social Development	MoSA	$ 358K			$ 254	1,410	$ 254	
Syria	Education	EoE	$ 304K		$ 32	$ 2.81	108,111	$ 2.81	91%
Syria	Social Development	EoW	$ 127K		$ 109	$ 46	2,774	$ 46	58%
Syria	Social Development	EoM	$ 96K		$ 70	$ 84	1,140	$ 84	-21%

Abbreviations:

MoE = Ministry of Education
MoH = Ministry of Health
MoPH = Ministry of Public Health
MEHE = Ministry of Education and Higher Education
CWC = Child Welcome Commission
EoE = Entity of Education
EoW = Entity of Women
EoM = Entity of Municipalities
CBOs = Community Based Organizations
MoSA = Ministry of Social Affairs
NCFA-MoSD = National Council of Family Affairs and Ministry of Social Development

Notes:

- IRC's investment per child varies significantly across partnerships and interventions due to differences in sector, reach, intervention design (e.g., dosage), and and stage of scaling at time of analysis (e.g., pilot, expansion, scale-up). Figures 6 and 7 illustrate the relationship between IRC's investment, child reach, and investment per child in the Iraq Ministry of Education case study.
- Financial data in this table reflects IRC's investment in these scaling partnerships. It does not include costs incurred by the scaling partners (for example, teacher salaries) or Sesame Workshop costs for media production
- "Cumulative investment" per child listed for a given year is calculated as the total amount of IRC's financial investment into that scaling partnership up to that year, divided by the total number of children reached with that scaling partnership up to that year.
- "Investment per child as of July 2024" refers to the total IRC investment through end of 2023 divided by the total number of children reached (as of the most recently reported reach numbers