HOW TO INTEGRATE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN USAID BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

USAID EDUCATION HOW-TO NOTE

MARCH 2021

How-To Notes provide additional design and implementation suggestions not covered in existing USAID Policy documents related to sub-areas of the USAID Education Policy.
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USAID developed the contents of this How-To Note through two workshops: a content creation workshop in December 2019, and a virtual validation workshop in October 2020. Though the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant delay between the two workshops, this product represents good practices for children and youth based on practical experience and known evidence. The guidance in this How-To Note reflects the USAID program cycle.

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### ACRONYMS

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>BHA</td>
<td>USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVE</td>
<td>Countering Violent Extremism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHPSS</td>
<td>Mental Health and Psychosocial Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRM</td>
<td>Department of State Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSS</td>
<td>Psychosocial Support Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEL</td>
<td>Social and Emotional Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDL</td>
<td>Universal Design for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VEO</td>
<td>Violent Extremist Organization</td>
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KEY TAKEAWAYS

This How-To Note continues USAID’s commitment to improving the technical quality of skills-based social and emotional learning programs. It aims to provide guidance on how to include and integrate skills-based social and emotional learning across the USAID program cycle into basic education programs, which serve children and youth (including adolescents) with a variety of formal and informal education programs, including youth workforce programs.

- Social and emotional skills are a set of cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that children, youth, and adults develop through everyday life experience as well as focused instruction. Evidence demonstrates that social and emotional skills support the success of learners of all ages at school, at work, and in life. The inclusion of social emotional learning in education systems can enable more equitable and inclusive learning environments that support all learners in reaching their full potential.

- The majority of governments already recognize the value of social and emotional learning (SEL) for children and youth, and about half of USAID education programs self-describe as targeting social and emotional skills or outcomes. USAID basic education programs should move toward expanding and deepening investments that support social and emotional skills and wellbeing.

- The 2018 USAID Education Policy named social and emotional skills as a measurable learning outcome and contributor to the overall wellbeing of children and youth, intentionally providing USAID Missions and implementing partners the opportunity to design and implement skills-based social and emotional learning programs at all levels of the education system.

- The four core principles of quality social and emotional learning programs are: 1) create a safe learning environment; 2) support capable adults; 3) prioritize contextual and cultural relevance; and 4) address social and emotional skills in combination, not isolation. Social and emotional learning must be contextualized when integrating skill development into basic education programming.

- The design and implementation of SEL programs should be carefully incorporated into the entire program cycle, including strategic planning (alignment to existing policies and strategies), project and activity design, monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and adaptive management.

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2 https://www.brookings.edu/research/visualizing-the-breadth-of-skills-movement-across-education-systems/
I. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, USAID implementing partners and researchers hosted a Social and Emotional Learning Policy Roundtable that made three key recommendations to the USAID education sector:

1. Include skills-based social and emotional learning in all education programming, with special attention to conflict and crisis-affected contexts.
2. Set initial standards for the field by ensuring that all social and emotional learning interventions include at least three key components: a safe learning environment; care for teachers, coaches, and mentors as well as student wellbeing; and implementation of high-quality skills-based programming.
3. Provide the leadership to advance the field of social and emotional learning through investments in research and learning, including implementation research, impact research, and measurement research.

In response to the Policy Roundtable, the 2018 USAID Education Policy made two critical decisions that shifted the position of these skills from relevant only to youth-serving education programs or education in crisis and conflict programs, to skills relevant across the education continuum. First, the Education Policy names social and emotional skills as a measurable learning outcome and recognizes them as a set of skills or competencies that contributes to the wellbeing of learners and educators. This provides USAID Missions and implementing partners the opportunity to design and implement skills-based social and emotional programming within all types of education programs and at all levels of the education system. Second, the USAID Education Policy identifies safety and wellbeing as essential ingredients of a quality education.

Then USAID’s Education Sector convened an internal Social and Emotional Learning Working Group in part to advance these recommendations under the Policy. In 2019, the Working Group released the Policy Brief on Social Emotional Learning and Soft Skills to outline initial definitions for the terms used across the education continuum at USAID, lay out the business case for why a USAID Mission may choose to focus on social and emotional learning in their education strategy, summarize the best available evidence, provide program quality standards, and outline a learning agenda.

This How-To-Note continues USAID’s commitment to improving the technical quality of skills-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. It aims to provide guidance on how to include and integrate skills-based social and emotional learning across the USAID program cycle into basic education programs, which serve children and youth (including adolescents) with a variety of formal and informal education programs, including youth workforce programs.
2. KEY DEFINITIONS, STRUCTURE, AND USE

2.1 Key Definitions

The 2018 USAID Education Policy provides two key definitions that shape this How-To Note: social and emotional skills and basic education programming.

Social and emotional skills are a set of cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that children, youth, and adults can learn that allows them to understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.1 The 2019 UNICEF Global Framework on Transferable Skills (pg.12) provides another intuitive definition of social and emotional skills: competencies a person needs in order to know or learn, to participate fully in society or the economy, to live peacefully with others, and to understand themselves and how to handle adversity.

Within USAID, you may see the terms “social and emotional skills” and the process by which learners acquire skills, “social and emotional learning” used in the context of formal or non-formal education programming across all levels of the education system. Youth-serving programs also use the term “soft skills” to refer to the same types of competencies. This How-To Note will use the term “social and emotional skills” for basic education programs that serve children or youth. Outside of the education sector, staff and partners may see terms like life skills, 21st century skills, non-cognitive skills, or transferable skills.

Social and emotional skills can be cognitive, social, or emotional. Cognitive skills include managing and shifting attention, impulse control, planning and goal setting, or solving complex problems. Social skills include conflict resolution, prosocial behaviors (i.e. behaviors motivated by a desire to help others like sharing, comforting, helping, or rescuing), making and keeping friends, or identifying social norms (just or unjust, equitable or inequitable). Emotional skills include empathy, self awareness (e.g. knowing your strengths and weaknesses, your biases or prejudices, or your social, cultural assets), identifying emotions, or the capacity to link feelings to values and thoughts.

Social and emotional skills are developmental; they emerge and change over time as a function of a learner’s environment, relationships, and neurological growth and development. They do not develop linearly, and typical patterns of growth may vary by gender, sex, or other demographic characteristics. This growth and development begins at birth and occurs into adolescence and early adulthood. Brain science demonstrates how the physical growth of the brain and its neural connections and networks interact with an individual’s personality, their values, their environment, and their experiences. For children and youth who have good health, physical and emotional safety, nurturing and secure relationships, and opportunities to intellectually grow and develop, whatever these things may look like in their culture or context, social and emotional skills grow and develop over time. When these children and youth face temporary shocks or stressors, even severe ones, they can remain resilient. Their social and emotional skills (in addition to other critical factors in the enabling environment) enable them to find what they need physically, socially, emotionally, or culturally, to absorb or adapt to a changing context. For this reason, USAID’s Map of Resilience Capacities for the Education Sector identifies

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1 USAID’s definition of social and emotional skills comes from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Their definition and framework is available at https://casel.org/what-is-sel/.
multiple types of social and emotional skills as potential individual resilience capacities that can promote and protect children and youth from adversity.

However, prolonged or accumulated exposure to adversity without any support or intervention disrupts the growth of social and emotional skills. Adversity includes chronic neglect, hunger, pervasive emotional, physical, or sexual violence (including direct experience or observation of armed conflict or intimate partner violence), displacement, homelessness, or exposure to natural disasters, amongst other types of experiences. When children and youth have neither the support from caring adults nor skills to find what they need to manage adversity, the biological response to stress (stress hormones) overloads the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that regulates many emotional and cognitive activities. This creates toxic levels of stress, which can negatively affect physical health, mental health, and cognitive development, and thus impacting a person’s ability to learn. Additionally, chronic parental neglect can undermine secure attachment and hinder a child’s ability to develop positive and trusting relationships with others or build self-efficacy and confidence. Without intervention or support, these effects can lead children and youth to have a harder time focusing on a lesson, sitting still, trusting caregivers, and regulating their impulses and emotions to develop healthy relationships.

Nevertheless, children and youth can learn social and emotional competencies or skills that allow them to manage or mitigate the effects of adversity or trauma as well as develop resilience. Yet, even if children and youth use social and emotional skills in the context of adversity, they learn them best through positive, supportive interactions. For example, a trusted adult listening and coaching a young person through a frightening or fraught experience or a teacher creating lessons and activities where learners can try and fail without embarrassment or rebuke. USAID has a particular comparative advantage in programming toward social and emotional competencies or skills because of the Agency’s existing expertise in the systems, policies, and approaches to teaching and learning from pre-primary through higher-education. Further, the scale and reach of education programming—formal and non-formal—can provide a pathway to sustainable and cost-efficient USAID investments.

**USAID basic education programming** refers to a wide spectrum of education programs and activities, from pre-primary through secondary education delivered in formal or non-formal settings. USAID basic education programs serve children and youth, including adolescents. USAID defines the youth population as people ages 10-29, which covers pre-adolescence, adolescence, and early adulthood. USAID basic education programs include:

- Programs that prepare an individual to be an active, productive member of society, through providing them with measurable improvements in their literacy, numeracy, or other basic skills development;
- Workforce development, vocational training, and digital literacy programs informed by real market needs and opportunities and that result in measurable improvements in employment; and
- Capacity building for administrators, teachers, youth workers, and caregivers that results in measurable improvements in student literacy, numeracy, or employment.

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2.2 Definitions, Similarities, and Differences between Social and Emotional Learning Programs and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programs

As defined by the Inter-agency Standing Committee on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, “mental health and psychosocial support describes any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial wellbeing and/or prevent or treat mental disorder.” Mental disorders as defined by the World Health Organization include mental, neurological, and substance abuse disorders as well as suicide risk, and their prevention or treatment can include specialized mental health services or health services provided in a non-specialized setting, outlined in the Mental Health Gap Action Programme Guidelines. Psychosocial support services (PSS) include the processes and actions that promote holistic wellbeing of people in their social spheres, including building the resilience of individuals, families, and communities. Some education systems or basic education programs may already provide mental health or psychosocial support services directly in the form of school social workers or counselors or peer support programs or may provide referrals to services like suicide prevention or mental health crisis hotlines.

Conflicts and crises are a significant source of adversity for learners, their families, and educators, as they bring hunger, homelessness, displacement, exposure to or direct experiences of violence at the community or household level, stress, uncertainty, deprivation, and fear. Over half of USAID’s partner countries experience acute or recurring conflicts or crises. Further, even in stable contexts, learners may experience adversity due to poverty, racism, sexism, ableism, social exclusion, family or intimate partner violence, parental neglect, or other factors. Any one of these experiences can overwhelm a learner’s ability to cope. Though some social and emotional learning programming and interventions can help mitigate the negative effects of adverse situations by fostering resilience and promoting protective factors that improve their ability to cope (e.g., healthy relationships with caregivers, positive coping strategies, problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills), they may not be sufficient for some learners. For this reason, USAID recommends ensuring that referral mechanisms to specialized mental health services are in place when delivering social and emotional programming.

Social and emotional learning programs and mental health and psychosocial support programs share important similarities. Both types of programs recognize safety as a prerequisite for improving outcomes; that people need holistic support; and that the environment around a learner or educator influences their social, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing and development. Both types of programs recognize that when people experience adversity, their mental health, their psychosocial wellbeing, and their social and emotional skills can help mitigate negative impacts; this holds true in stable as well as conflict or crisis-affected contexts. Finally, both types of programs recognize that the education system (and educators) can often provide more than academic instruction. Education services can provide a safe space, a return to normalcy, and an opportunity to access specialized services like mental health and psychosocial support.

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6 For more information about mental health, see the World Health Organization: https://www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_1

7 Further information on how to research and construct a referral pathway for MHPSS can be found in the IASC MHPSS Guidelines: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-force-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/iasc-guidelines-mental
Table 1 lays out five questions that can help illustrate the differences between social and emotional skills programs and mental health or psychosocial support programs in practice.

**TABLE 1: SEL/SOFT SKILLS VS. MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT OR LEARNING PROGRAMS</th>
<th>MENTAL HEALTH OR PSYCHOSOCIAL PROGRAMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who needs social and emotional vs. MHPSS programs?</td>
<td>Any learner in a basic education program, formal or non-formal, will benefit from an educational service that takes a holistic view to their growth and development. A formative assessment should use a strengths-based perspective, in order to build off of what skills learners and educators possess or practice, rather than attempt to diagnose what skills learners or educators lack.</td>
<td>Learners or educators exhibiting signs of distress or who have experienced adversity. IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings estimates that 3-5 percent of an affected population will need mental health services, and up to 20 percent of an affected population will need psychosocial support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the goal?</td>
<td>Social and emotional skills programs build social, emotional, or cognitive skills that all learners need for success at school, at work, and in life.</td>
<td>Mental health and psychosocial support programs prevent mental health problems or address specific mental health concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you measure?</td>
<td>Knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, or skills (cognitive, emotional, or social).</td>
<td>Mental health outcomes; physical, emotional, or social wellbeing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is an example of this type of program?</td>
<td>A teacher or facilitator provides learners with skills for how to work through conflict in a small group (i.e. take turns to talk, make eye contact, use positive language, compromise).</td>
<td>A trained lay counselor or a mental health professional facilitates cognitive behavioral therapy for learners who have been identified as at-risk by their teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When do these programs end?</td>
<td>They don’t. Social and emotional programming runs with the basic education program as a constant feature because learning, growth, and development do not stop.</td>
<td>When learners have recovered or it becomes clear they need more specialized services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**2.3 Structure and Use of this How-To Note**

USAID Missions and implementing partners can use this How-To Note for the strategic planning, design, and implementation of skills-based social and emotional learning programs in three scenarios: 1) when social and emotional learning programs or activities stand alone; 2) when social and emotional learning programs or activities integrate, layer, or sequence with other types of basic education programs; and 3) when other sectors beyond education need guidance or information about how to plan for, design, and implement programs or activities that contribute to the growth and development of social and emotional skills.

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emotional skills. USAID recommends first reading the USAID Education Policy Brief on Social and Emotional Learning and Soft Skills for an initial orientation.⁹

This How-To Note is structured as follows:

- **Section 3: Core Principles and Implementation Framework** outlines the four core principles that should guide social and emotional programming in any sector. This section also presents the Implementation Framework, a visual guide to the key implementation steps.
- **Section 4: Strategic Planning** explains how to identify and plan for a focus on social and emotional skills development, with a particular emphasis on cross-sectoral relevance and collaboration.
- **Section 5: Project and Activity Design** outlines various design options (how SEL activities can be integrated, layered, or sequenced with existing basic education programs) and explains how to articulate specific, measurable goals and outcomes.
- **Section 6: Project and Activity Implementation** is the most detailed section. This section explains how to identify and engage key stakeholders; create, validate, and update a theory of change, identify, define, prioritize, and contextualize social and emotional skills; and design for equity. Finally, this section provides principles, considerations, and best practices for how to use six potential entry points into basic education programming to support social and emotional growth and development of children and youth.
- **Section 7: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning** provides guidance and references to existing tools for learner-level measurement that can support data-driven decision-making and management of USAID-funded programs or activities.

Many of the resources referenced in this document, as well as other education-related guides, tools, and templates, can be accessed through USAID’s [EducationLinks](https://www.edu-links.org/resources/social-and-emotional-learning-and-soft-skills) or [Social and Emotional Learning and Soft Skills](https://www.edu-links.org/resources/social-and-emotional-learning-and-soft-skills) websites.

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⁹ https://www.edu-links.org/resources/social-and-emotional-learning-and-soft-skills
3. CORE PRINCIPLES AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

3.1 Four Core Principles

Four core principles of quality social and emotional programming for children and youth, in formal or non-formal education environments, emerge from a comparison of the empirical and practical evidence distilled in the 2019 USAID Social and Emotional Learning and Soft Skills Policy Brief and the Guiding Principles on Building Soft Skills Among Adolescents and Young Adults.

Core Principle 1: Create a safe learning environment. No matter where learning happens, the environment must be physically, emotionally, and socially safe (see Priority 1 of the 2018 USAID Education Policy). Safe learning environments provide a foundation for a virtuous cycle of learning and growth of social and emotional skills. Safety may also be a prerequisite for the enrollment, participation, or retention of children and youth who often face threats to their safety at or on the way to a basic education program (e.g. young women and girls, learners affected by crisis or conflict, displaced learners, learners with disabilities, or otherwise marginalized learners). Social safety or emotional safety requires a learning environment not only free from threats or harm, but that also includes every learner, encourages their sense of belonging, and promotes positive and trusting relationships between learners or between learners and educators or adults.

Core Principle 2: Support capable adults. Social and emotional skill development happens most effectively when children and youth see social and emotional skills modeled, practice using them with their peers and adults, have the opportunity and support to reflect on their experiences, and receive feedback. To create these conditions, basic education programs should plan to support the workplace safety and wellbeing of the adults who lead, teach, or support learners as well as assure they have the necessary knowledge and skills. Social and emotional skills programs do not require specialty staff, and so the adults who support learning may be trained, certified teachers, counselors, or social workers, or they may be non-certified trainers, facilitators, mentors, or family members. Even trained or certified professionals may not have full information or insight into the brain science or evidence around social and emotional skills for children and youth, given the speed at which the field is growing. Starting from a scientific perspective may also create common ground and terminology for discussion, separated from morality, religion, or national, cultural, or tribal values.

When working with teachers, coaches, mentors, or facilitators, professional training or in-service professional development should bridge the gap between the theory and practice of social and emotional learning by connecting their conceptualizations of social and emotional skill building in formal and non-formal learning settings to their teaching, learning, and classroom management practices.

SHARE THE SCIENCE

For young learners, the Harvard Center on the Developing Child has short videos and briefs that reviews the science on brain development, toxic stress, and the hallmarks of nurturing relationships.

For youth, the State of Massachusetts’ Department of Youth Services published a brief that summarizes some of the relevant brain science for youth in less than two pages.

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10 The term “teachers” includes all educators, including instructional staff in both formal and non-formal settings.
Finally, in contexts affected by conflict and crisis or in extremely rural areas, the learning environment may be at home or in a community space, with parents, grandparents, or other adults. This principle applies to these adults too.

Core Principle 3: Prioritize skills with contextual and cultural relevance. Recall that social and emotional skills are developmental: they emerge and change over time as a function of a learner’s environment, relationships, and neurological growth and development. This means that the time at which children and youth acquire skills and the ways in which they demonstrate mastery will vary from country to country, and from place to place within a country.

Thus, a basic education program should work closely with national, regional, and local stakeholders to ensure that the skills targeted by a program or activity have contextual and cultural relevance. In a post-conflict or conflict-affected country, working with stakeholders will require an understanding of conflict dynamics in order to ensure adaptation and consultation processes are appropriately inclusive. This also means that off-the-shelf or pre-packaged social and emotional programs should not be implemented directly (i.e. without contextualization), even if they have strong evidence of impact in another country. For example, the education-related social and emotional learning programs with the most empirical evidence about impact and implementation are designed for learners in the United States. Transplanting these programs into contexts where USAID invests in basic education programming requires more than language translation. The skills of a program have to be locally relevant and valued. Program implementers must have knowledge and understanding about how skills may be best practiced based on age, gender, disability, displacement status, or other critical factor of identity. Section 6.4 of this paper provides more detailed guidance on contextualization.

Core Principle 4: “Address skills in combination, not isolation” (Soares et al. 2017). Social and emotional skills do not grow linearly, and they do not grow the same way or at the same rate for all learners (e.g. a learner will not have the same amount of growth in the same skills each year). As a reflection of the natural growth and development of social and emotional skills, basic education programs should plan to introduce, practice, reinforce, and apply social and emotional skills in developmentally appropriate ways across social, emotional, or cognitive domains. The ways in which basic education programs can teach and nurture a combination of social and emotional skills will vary based on the program type, program goal, and a local understanding of learner skills and competencies. For example, in the context of a formal curriculum, social and emotional skills development may have a sequence across grade levels, strategically adding new skills and practicing or reinforcing skills learned previously in new situations or in the context of new subjects or content. In a vocational training program, learners may practice and apply skills in shorter cycles of experiential learning.
3.2 Implementation Framework

**FIGURE 1: IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

Figure 1 above provides a snapshot of the key implementation details for social and emotional learning programs in basic education. The middle of the graphic, entitled “entry points,” lists common components of USAID-funded basic education programs. USAID and implementing partners can use any of these entry points to implement social emotional skills development programs. Section 6 further defines these entry points and offers best practices, key considerations, and principles for implementation. The left-hand side of the graphic provides an overview of the implementation steps from needs assessment to final monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes. The middle of the graphic, entitled “entry points,” lists common components of USAID-funded basic education programs. USAID and implementing partners can use any of these entry points to implement social emotional skills development programs. Section 6 further defines these entry points and offers best practices, key considerations, and principles for implementation. The right-hand side of the graphic notes the variety of improved outcomes that USAID and partners can expect from basic education programming that focuses on social and emotional skills development.
4. STRATEGIC PLANNING

Almost half of USAID-funded education programs already aim to improve social and emotional skills: according to internal USAID data, in 2020, 37 out of 59 USAID Missions or Regional Offices and 47 percent of USAID-funded activities promoted social and emotional skills. This section reviews important choices, data, and information for strategic planning regardless of whether programming toward social and emotional skills is a new or existing strategic priority for the USAID Mission or Regional Office. Relevant USAID policies and the best available evidence indicate overall the imperative and benefits to including social and emotional skills in basic education portfolios across several contexts and program types.

Strategic questions to answer on basic education investments in social and emotional learning include:

- What goals does the partner country have for the holistic learning and development of children and youth? What policies, frameworks, or data exist?
- What shocks and stressors affect individuals, communities, or systems? (See Annex 3 of the Education and Resilience white paper for a list of common shocks or stressors relevant to education programs).
- Which populations or geographies bear a disproportionate burden of shocks or stresses?
- Will basic education investments in social and emotional skills development intentionally contribute to cross-sectoral outcomes, for example in economic growth or resilience or inclusion?
- What is USAID’s comparative advantage in that country in social and emotional skills programming?
- What age range(s) will USAID focus on? What target population(s) within the age range(s) will be served (i.e. girls, displaced people, people with disabilities, etc.)?
- Will USAID serve learners or educators affected by conflict and crisis?

4.1 Alignment to Existing Policies and Strategies

The 2019-2023 U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education and the 2018 USAID Education Policy recognize social and emotional skills development as a learning outcome critical to the success of learners at school (from pre-primary to higher education), at work, and in life. The 2018 USAID Education Policy explicitly notes the importance of social and emotional skills development across the first three priorities linked to basic education programming:

- Priority 1: Children and youth, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable, have increased access to quality education that is safe, relevant, and promotes social wellbeing. Section 3 of this How-To Note describes safety and relevance as universal principles of social and emotional programming, regardless of the program type or population served. Section 2 of this How-To Note describes how social and emotional learning promotes wellbeing.
• Priority 2: Children and youth gain literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills that are foundational to future learning and success. Evidence demonstrates the potential that social and emotional skills have to improve academic learning outcomes as well as long-term life outcomes for children and youth. See Section 4 of the 2019 USAID Policy Brief on Social Emotional Learning and Soft Skills for language and citations on the best available evidence for review and inclusion in strategic planning.

• Priority 3: Youth gain the skills they need to lead productive lives, gain employment, and positively contribute to society. Similarly, evidence demonstrates the strong correlation between social and emotional (or soft skills) for youth in a variety of education, workforce, and life outcomes. The Youth Power What Works Series as well as Section 4 of the 2019 USAID Policy Brief on Social Emotional Learning and Soft Skills provides language and citations on the best available evidence that can be consulted or included in strategic planning.

Social and emotional programming also provides an evidence-based pathway to equity and inclusion, one of the principles of the 2018 USAID Education Policy. Education programs that purposefully and actively build social and emotional skills in the context of a positive learning environment can foster inclusivity. They may reduce bias in discipline, school management, or instructional approaches that prevent girls, learners with disabilities, minorities, or other types of marginalized learners from accessing and benefiting from education programs. They may reduce stigmas associated with disability, increase self-worth, and provide a sense of belonging among children with disabilities.

INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT REINFORCE EACH OTHER

“Attending class alongside a student with a disability can yield positive impacts on the social attitudes and beliefs of non-disabled students. A literature review describes five benefits of inclusion for non-disabled students: reduced fear of human differences, accompanied by increased comfort and awareness (less fear of people who look or behave differently); growth in social cognition (increased tolerance of others, more effective communication with all peers); improvements in self-concept (increased self-esteem, perceived status, and sense of belonging); development of personal moral and ethical principles (less prejudice, higher responsiveness to the needs of others); and warm and caring friendships.” (p. 12)

“There is also evidence that participating in inclusive settings can yield social and emotional benefits for students with disabilities. Such social and emotional benefits can include forming and maintaining positive peer relationships, which have important implications for a child’s learning and psychological development. Research suggests that students with disabilities often struggle to develop peer relationships.” (p. 13)


11 Example: one-year impacts of a universal social and emotional learning intervention with primary school students in the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrated that impacts were largest for the math scores of language minority children and in low-performing schools. J. Lawrence Aber et al., “Impacts After One Year of ‘Healing Classroom’ on Children’s Reading and Math Skills in DRC: Results from a Cluster Randomized Trial.” Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness 10, no. 3 (2017): 507-29
12 Ha Yeon Kim et al., “The Impact of IRC’s Healing Classrooms Tutoring on Children’s Learning and Social Emotional Outcomes in Niger.” International Rescue Committee and New York University Policy Brief, Number 2.2.2 (2019)
Beyond the Education sector, any portfolio with stand-alone or cross-cutting programming using a Positive Youth Development approach or social and emotional skills development (also called “soft skills”) should form part of the strategy to increase the assets or agency that young people use to achieve their goals. The USAID Youth Policy equally reflects the importance of these skills in long-term outcomes for young people.

In contexts affected by crises or conflicts (about 80 percent of the places where USAID works overall according to the 2019 USAID Policy Framework, and about half of the places where USAID supports basic education programming according to internal data), social and emotional skills can mitigate the impacts of adversity, stress, and violence on children and youth. In USAID resilience focus countries especially, social and emotional skills can be characterized as the critical absorptive or adaptive resilience capacities that support young people (and their households) in the face of shocks and stresses.

In contexts where violent extremist organizations are active, education programming may directly or indirectly contribute to the Agency’s Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency Policy by building the capacity of local education institutions and organizations to counter efforts by violent extremist organizations (VEOs) to recruit and radicalize young people. Based on an analysis of local countering violent extremism (CVE) policies, plans and efforts, and VEO tactics, social and emotional skill development may feature heavily in Programming Education within Countering Violent Extremism Programs (Ed-CVE). For example, CVE-specific education programs may focus on building young people’s sense of belonging and reducing feelings of marginalization or isolation, or they may focus on building tolerance and respect for diversity. CVE-relevant education programs may focus on building safe and supportive learning environments, reducing the likelihood that school-based violence, bullying, or exploitation will lead to a triggering event for learners vulnerable to recruitment or radicalization. As stated previously, the most effective CVE-specific education programs include meaningful opportunities for young people to practice and apply their skills, increasing learners’ sense of agency and self-efficacy.

USING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AS PART OF AN EDUCATION STRATEGY TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The Education Recovery Support Activity (ERSA) addresses the needs of children and youth whose education has been disrupted by hostilities in Mali. Through ERSA, accelerated education opportunities are designed and implemented in a conflict-sensitive way that promotes resilience, peace building, and inclusiveness. In 2018, ERSA conducted a Rapid Education and Risk Analysis (RERA) which helped to strengthen the project’s conflict-sensitive approaches. This analysis identified critical soft skills that needed to be incorporated into learning interventions so as to improve stability and reduce the pull of extremist groups in the north/east of the country.

This led to the development of The Living Together (Vivre Ensemble) curriculum, which promotes resilience, empathy, and cooperation. Vivre Ensemble forms one third of the overall accelerated education curriculum and includes life skills, peace building, citizenship, conflict mitigation and prevention, WASH, the arts, physical activities, and some core social-emotional learning competencies, especially social awareness, in the specific context of the Northern Mali Conflict.
4.2 Analysis, Evidence, and Data for Strategic Planning

Analysis or evidence useful for the strategic planning phase should come from existing sources rather than new data collection or analysis. Data about policy objectives, learning environments (informal and formal), child and/or youth protection legal frameworks or policies, administrators, teachers, parents and learners, the classroom or school climate, faith-based organizations, or out of school environments should be used strategically to inform planning and implementation from classrooms and communities all the way to the national level.

Review national policies, plans, curriculum frameworks, or standards and benchmarks from education, technical and vocational training, or youth sectors. Due to the wide range of terminology in use, search for policies, plans, curricula, frameworks, or standards from peace education, citizenship or global citizenship, moral education, civic education, or transversal education, in addition to technical and vocational education as well as pre-primary through secondary education. Many countries have already integrated or prioritized some types of social and emotional skill or competency in their mission or vision statements or their curriculum at varying levels of specificity. The Brookings Institute created an interactive map and report based on a review of publicly available information from Ministries of Education in 102 countries in 2016: they found that out of 102 countries, 76 of them mention social and emotional skills at some point in a strategic document, mostly at the level of the curriculum. Another resource useful for reviewing frameworks, policies, or standards and benchmarks that may be in use but do not come from a Ministry of Education include the Harvard EASEL Lab Explore SEL website, which lists a variety of frameworks in use internationally.

During this review, engage a variety of local stakeholders, including ministry counterparts as well as learners, their families, and those at the most local level of the education system or program. See Section 6.2 for more details and guidance on stakeholder identification and engagement.

Existing datasets that measure social and emotional skills for learners at a national or regional level likely will need to come from other stakeholders at the country level, like relevant ministries, donors, or implementing partners. However, a USAID Mission may also review regional or country-specific data from sources like the OECD Study on Social and Emotional Skills (learners ages 10 and 15 years old) or the Programme for International Student Assessment, the International Development and Early Learning Assessment Network datasets (learners ages 3.5 to 6 years old), the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM, for grade 5 learners in Southeast Asia), the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE, for grade 6 students in Latin America), or the Life Skills and Citizenship Education assessments (for learners in the Middle East region). National or regional level assessments of social and emotional skills are relatively new, with many being implemented in the last 5 to 10 years. Importantly, like many national or regional assessments, learners affected by crisis and conflict and learners with disabilities (in both stable and unstable environments) are often undersampled or entirely left out of sampling plans; if a basic education portfolio aims to serve learners affected by crisis or conflict or those with disabilities, available data should be used as part of strategic planning, but at the activity level, collecting primary data is generally required.

The 2019 USAID Education Policy Brief provides examples and tips for how to communicate about social and emotional skills across sectors.
Social and emotional skills development has cross-sectoral relevance. It may be that evidence, evaluations, or analysis from other sectors such as health, democracy and governance, economic growth, gender equity and women’s empowerment, disability inclusive development, food security and agriculture, or humanitarian response efforts identify the relevance and need for strengthening the social and emotional skills that may contribute to the strategic planning for basic education investments. Consider regional evidence as well as country-specific evidence, particularly if target populations (e.g. pastoralists, displaced populations) may come from across a border. For example, if there is an operational protection cluster or education cluster, recently completed needs assessments may have information about the social and emotional or psychosocial wellbeing and needs of learners, their families, or the education system. The Violence Against Children Survey may also provide useful secondary data about threats to safety that affect youth in particular.

A conflict analysis may provide information about the two-way interaction between the education systems and conflict drivers—how the explicit and implicit education in a country mitigated or contributed to violent conflict. For example, education or workforce training systems (formal or non-formal) may have furthered marginalization, exclusion, and grievance for specific populations. Understanding the relationship between inequity, grievance, conflict, and education at a high level will provide initial insights into the ways that social and emotional programming could benefit the basic education portfolio (e.g. building skills such as tolerance or empathy for others, or an appreciation for diversity).

One assessment that commonly occurs during strategic planning is the USAID gender analysis. The gender analysis at the strategic planning level can include relevant findings about safety (or lack thereof) for women and girls; laws, policies, regulations, or institutional practices that influence how women and girls are held accountable for their behavior at home, at work, or at school; cultural norms and beliefs that define a “good” man or woman, and subsequently which types of social and emotional competencies may be prioritized early on for children and youth; gender roles, responsibilities, and time use that can inform what women and girls do for recreation or for culturally significant celebrations that can be used for activity level design; information about access to and control over assets or resources, which can inform how to best support the adults who are critical to the success of children and youth; and patterns of power and decision-making, which shed light on the ways social skills in particular play out in various settings. The gender analysis can also provide overall information about the ways in which basic education services are delivered equitably and the extent to which women and girls succeed. Further, some USAID Missions carry out gender and social inclusion analyses to assess the differential impacts experienced by men, women, boys, and girls on account of other characteristics such as disability status, ethnicity, migration status, sexual orientation, and others. This holistic approach can also be bolstered by activity-level needs assessments that focus on specific populations, like youth and persons with disabilities (discussed in Section 6). USAID Offices of Education at the Mission level should assure that questions specific to safety and social and emotional or psychosocial wellbeing of children and youth as well as their families and staff and personnel in the education system are included in the gender analysis.

Finally, USAID carries out a variety of analyses linked to disability-inclusive development. The analyses may have relevant findings of use for design, including but not limited to information about safety or protection issues that children or youth with disabilities uniquely face, laws or institutional

practices that limit or encourage their full and independent participation in learning or in life, or cultural beliefs or values that influence how communities or society think about and act toward people with disabilities. If Disabled Persons Organizations have been mapped and interviewed, this can also provide an initial market analysis of what inclusive social and emotional programming may already exist.

### 4.3 Cross-sectoral Collaboration

Basic education programs may find it useful to coordinate or collaborate with other sectors around the growth and development of social and emotional skills under various circumstances at a strategic level. Coordination or collaboration does not require integrated development objectives or intermediate results—instead it can be as simple as identifying the extent to which social and emotional skills are a shared outcome between basic education and one other sector, and understanding each sector’s comparative advantage in achieving the outcome.

Within a USAID Mission, sectors like economic growth, democracy and governance, and health may target youth, alongside basic education programs. Since social and emotional skills (potentially referred to as soft skills, leadership skills, non-cognitive skills, transferable skills, or life skills by other sectors) support the success of youth in multiple ways, exploring the extent to which youth-serving programs can have shared or harmonized approaches to targeting and/or a logical sequence may inform strategic planning.

Though humanitarian assistance is not necessarily included in a USAID Mission’s strategic or operational plan, safety, psychosocial wellbeing, and social and emotional learning or skills development may be shared outcomes between USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs (BHA), the Department of State’s Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), and USAID’s basic education programs. Understanding the ways in which protection programs funded through BHA and education programs for refugees or other displaced populations through State/PRM will target geographic areas or beneficiaries, the relative sequence or timelines of these programs, and the ways in which they will engage with communities or governments can help inform basic education strategy. Given the high average length of displacements and emergencies, it is likely that these investments in some countries will run concurrently.

If a basic education portfolio operates in a Mission where countering violent extremism is a U.S. government priority, coordinating with the U.S. State Department or USAID’s stabilization programs (e.g. OTI) may provide important insights into understanding how violent extremist organizations exploit vulnerabilities in the youth population in order to recruit and radicalize them. Often such programs have regional or country-specific analyses of extremist activity and tactics that can inform the geographic, demographic, or skills focus of an education program, be it CVE-specific or CVE-relevant.

The USAID Humanitarian Development Coherence White Paper illustrates how education and protection sectors from USAID BHA, State/PRM, and USAID Education may sequence or combine together to create a seamless education or protection response that supports the mental health or psychosocial needs of learners and educators as well as lays the foundation for quality social and emotional programming.
5. PROJECT AND ACTIVITY DESIGN

This section makes recommendations on the design of projects and activities that reinforce key principles in the USAID Education Policy and contribute to the achievement of measurable, sustained social and emotional learning outcomes.

USAID recommends beginning with a broad understanding of the strategy, goal, and context of the program or activity at the planning and design phase (e.g. pre-procurement). Reserve needs assessments, identifying or refining frameworks and skills, and the process of contextualizing these skills for an implementing partner to carry out during the life of an awarded activity.

Key questions to answer likely at the design phase are listed in Table 2.

**TABLE 2: KEY QUESTIONS FOR PROJECT AND ACTIVITY DESIGN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>KEY QUESTIONS</th>
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| Strategy (Section 5.1)   | How will USAID sequence, layer, or integrate social and emotional skill programs within the basic education portfolio and/or with investments made by other donors or sectors?  
What are the gaps in existing programs or activities supported by a host partner government or other donors? |
| Context (Section 5.2)    | What sources of resilience already exist that support the social and emotional development of learners or educators? In other words, what social, cultural, religious, environmental, or physical factors, assets, networks, or capacities promote or protect the growth of social and emotional skills?  
What sources of adversity affect individuals, communities, or systems in the targeted geography(ies)? Which populations or geographies bear a disproportionate burden of shocks or stresses? What populations or geographies are marginalized for any other reason?  
How can USAID basic education programming scale, institutionalize, reinforce, or protect these resources?  
How does the basic education system interact with these identified sources of resilience or sources of adversity? |
| Goal (Section 5.3)       | What is the goal of USAID basic education programming for a specific group of beneficiaries, in a specific place? |

5.1 Design for Coherence: Sequence, Layer, Integrate

Designing coherent activities means deciding how social and emotional policies, programs, or services will be sequenced, layered, or integrated over a period of three to five years.

**Sequencing** means programs or services hand-off to each other, as particular thresholds, triggers, or benchmarks are met. For example, if a USAID Mission has never programmed toward social and emotional skills within a basic education portfolio, initial programs or activities might focus on understanding the policy landscape, identifying contextually and culturally relevant skills and how they are traditionally taught or practiced, completing a situational analysis, or training and learning with key stakeholders at various levels of the education system. They may also seek to build on investments made in child protection or humanitarian assistance programs that focused on direct services for child or

youth safety and wellbeing. Benchmarks or thresholds for success may include buy-in for social and emotional programming amongst key stakeholders, a shared vision or goal for social and emotional learning, or a plan for how to advance the goal. The next set of programs or services may focus on operationalizing social and emotional learning for learners and educators through direct service delivery or training or capacity development or advancing policy or measurement. In some contexts, USAID’s social and emotional investments may be sequenced with the investments made by other donors or partners in order to sustain or scale interventions that align with government priorities and plans.

**Layering** refers to multiple services provided to the same population in the same place. For example, programs or services that create a safe learning environment for primary schools, secondary schools, or accelerated learning programs may be layered with age-appropriate classroom-based social and emotional instruction in those same schools. Training and coaching for adults, whether certified teachers, trainers, or caregivers, can layer onto interventions to support their own social and emotional wellbeing, like mindfulness interventions or peer support groups. When applying a social-ecological model, USAID may also want to consider how education sector investments in social and emotional programs can be layered into communities where other sectors or other donors are investing in parents, households, or communities. For example, a school-based social and emotional learning program may deliver larger impacts when layered into a community where parents benefit from a parenting or livelihoods program. Such layering of interventions can also create opportunities to measure the comparative effectiveness of various intervention models (e.g. with or without a household intervention focused on parents). While USAID-funded activities can more easily coordinate with each other through Agreement Officer’s Representative/Contracting Officer’s Representative collaboration, they may require additional support and supervision when coordinating across donors and partners.

**Integration** refers to a set of policies, programs, or services that work together as a single system. For example, there could be “whole school” approaches to social and emotional learning or integrating social and emotional instruction alongside academic, technical, or vocational learning within a curriculum. Integration may also include integrating education outcomes into activities or projects in other sectors. For example, where food security programs are working with youth on agricultural livelihoods and value chains, building social and emotional skills or soft skills may contribute to both livelihood outcomes as well as measurable learning outcomes for youth.

Planning for coherence can happen within an activity or across multiple activities at the project level. The [ADS 201](https://www.usaid.gov/for-coordinators/accelerating-development-education-strategy) defines projects as “a set of activities designed and managed in a coordinated way to advance result(s) set forth in a Country Development Cooperation Strategy and foster lasting gains

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**In countries or contexts characterized by recurrent crises, increasing the number of learners who have access to a safe, relevant education that protects and promotes social and emotional skills may pay dividends for decades in terms of improved outcomes for learners. USAID invests in education in crisis and conflict-affected areas because evidence on the impact and cost-benefit of social and emotional learning programs points to the importance of early intervention for learners.**

**In crisis- or conflict-affected settings, aim to integrate social and emotional learning within the educational experience of learners (regardless of the type of education they receive or where they receive it). Layer safety interventions with the social and emotional learning programming, and sequence with psychosocial support interventions as needed.**

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along the Journey to Self-Reliance in a country or region. Through a project approach, Missions often can create synergies among complementary activities that generate higher-level results than would be possible to achieve through the sum of their individual performances."

A project may provide benefit to the quality and performance of basic education programs that seek to achieve social and emotional outcomes when the basic education portfolio aims to:

- Sequence social and emotional programming or services across a wide range of the education continuum or age groups.
- Advance measurement of or research on social and emotional skills or programs.
- Design novel or innovative approaches to increasing equitable, safe, quality social and emotional programming and bring them to scale.
- Work with other sectors to achieve social and emotional outcomes, very often for youth-serving programs.

5.2 Contextual Analysis

Recall that social and emotional skills are developmental: they emerge and change over time as a function of a learner’s environment, relationships, and neurological growth and development. A contextual analysis should seek to understand: 1) the ways in which the social, educational, cultural, religious, and physical environments promote the growth of social and emotional skills at home, at work, at school, or in the community; 2) the types and sources of adversity (including conflict or crisis) that may undermine the growth of social and emotional skills; 3) the ways in which the basic education system interacts with both the promotive or protective factors as well as the sources of adversity; 4) the opportunities USAID has to contribute to the growth, strengthening, or institutionalization or protective or promotive factors; and 5) the most marginalized learners or areas. At this phase of project or activity design, the contextual analysis should have sufficient detail to guide USAID Missions in making strategic choices about the intended results and their targets, target populations and geographies, and implementation or operational requirements of a project or activity in light of the context. For example, if a basic education program operates in a context where hurricanes regularly close education services or where a school community experiences the loss of community members due to violence, illness, or displacement, then an implementing partner will need to implement a social and emotional skills program that also includes some amount of psychosocial support services as learners and educators work through grief or loss.

5.3 Articulate a Goal, Based on the Best Available Evidence

USAID’s basic education programs can improve social and emotional skills for learners or educators as one of the main outcomes of a project or activity because there is extensive evidence that these skills either improve or predict success at school, at work, and in life. Additionally, USAID basic education programs may improve social and emotional skills as a means to another cross-sectoral goal. For example, for youth-serving programs, basic education programs may improve social and emotional skills as a means to increase civic engagement, decrease the propensity for violence, or build individual or household resilience.

Figure 2 provides examples of goals within and beyond the education sector that USAID Missions may consider when designing activities or projects.
FIGURE 2: GOALS WITHIN AND BEYOND THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Goals for social and emotional skill development within the basic education sector

- Improve social, emotional, or cognitive skills
- Increase retention or attainment
- Improve academic outcomes
- Improve equity of outcomes for marginalized learners
- Protect or promote learner or educator wellbeing
- Improve employability, employment, or earnings
- Improve sense of belonging

Goals for social and emotional skill development beyond the basic education sector

- Decrease propensity for violence
- Increase civic engagement
- Build individual or household resilience
- Protect mental health of learners and educators
- Increase social responsibility
- Improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes
6. PROJECT AND ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION

Once the strategy and goal have been outlined in light of the context, USAID recommends that implementing partners focus on needs assessment, stakeholder identification and engagement, and the selection and contextualization of relevant social and emotional skills critical for activity implementation. Key questions to answer at the implementation phase are listed in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>KEY QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define the needs (Section 6.1)</td>
<td>Does the education system provide quality, relevant, safe education for all learners? Is the learning environment safe and inclusive? What threats to safety exist to/from or within the learning environment? How do these threats to safety interact with basic education programming? What wellbeing or psychosocial needs do learners and educators have? Do learners, educators, or their families have unmet basic needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify and engage stakeholders (Section 6.2)</td>
<td>Who are the key stakeholders at the Ministry level, at the community level, and at the school level? Who affects learners’ lives and educational experiences? How can their input be prioritized to create holistic social and emotional skill development efforts in the learning environment and at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create, validate, or update a theory of change (Section 6.3)</td>
<td>Which outcomes will improve? How will they improve? (consider all possible pathways) What environmental factors will influence these outcomes? What activities or interventions could drive these changes? How will shocks and stresses affect this theory?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify and prioritize social and emotional skills (Section 6.4)</td>
<td>What does a successful learner look like here? What kinds of behaviors, skills, attitudes, mindsets, or beliefs distinguish a successful learner from an unsuccessful learner? What skills are necessary to be successful in school, at work, and in life in their local and national community? What social and emotional outcomes are most relevant for the local context, targeted beneficiaries, partner government, and USAID?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operationalize: Choose the most relevant and feasible entry points (Section 6.5)</td>
<td>What are the most feasible, relevant entry points for social and emotional skill development? What skills will an educator, coach, teacher, or facilitator need in order to act on these entry points?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1 Define the Needs

Defining the needs of the beneficiary population will allow the implementing partner to create or refine a theory of change, implementation approach, and intervention content.
Safety and inclusion. Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment is a core principle of social and emotional programming. Threats to safety can be internal, external, or environmental. Creating a safe learning environment happens at the activity level and requires a needs assessment or diagnostic like the Safe Learning Environments Toolkit, followed by tailored, contextually relevant plans to reduce, mitigate, or prevent threats to safety. If there is an operational protection cluster or education cluster, recently completed needs assessments may have information about the threats to safety of learners, their families, or the education system that may be used in place of primary data. Over the implementation period, threats to safety may change in type, scale, or frequency, and activities should have a plan and resources to adapt or respond accordingly. Finally, preventing, eliminating, or mitigating threats to safety requires a range of programs. For information and evidence on interventions that improve safety, consult the Youth Power Safe Spaces Brief, the Education in Conflict and Crisis Network Safety Gap Maps or the Evidence Pathways as well as resources like the International Rescue Committee’s Outcomes and Evidence Framework.

Similarly, implementing an inclusive program requires an understanding of the drivers of marginalization or exclusion, so that an implementing partner can identify the activity’s contribution toward creating an inclusive learning environment. USAID guidance exists on disability inclusive education as well as inclusive development within the program cycle, which can provide resources on assessments and analyses. Marginalized and vulnerable populations often face additional barriers to education (e.g., exposure to poverty), including social and emotional learning. Experiences with exclusionary discipline practices and policies, lack of trauma-informed school practices, implicit bias in school staff, and educator’s stress are all named as barriers to learners receiving and building social and emotional skills. Further, without an equity lens, social and emotional skill development programs can instead serve as a metric of compliance and conformity to patriarchal or colonial values and standards.

Mental health or psychosocial needs. Examples of needs assessments specifically created to assess mental health or psychosocial needs include the WHO/UNHCR Assessing mental health and psychosocial needs and resources, UNICEF’s Community Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings (for children and youth), or IOM’s Psychosocial Needs Assessment in Emergency Displacement, Early Recovery, and Return. These three guides provide information and tools to plan, design, and carry out the results of psychosocial needs assessment. For a needs assessment focused almost entirely on children, keep in mind that data will often come from adults reporting on the needs of children. For youth, implementing partners should plan to ask young people directly, if it is possible to do so without causing harm, in keeping with best practices from youth programming.

Education sector or system needs. Section 5.1 discusses how social and emotional programs can integrate, layer, or sequence with other basic education investments. Understanding the goals, approaches,
constraints, or facilitating factors for learning through an education sector analysis (UNESCO IIEP), an education systems assessment (World Bank-SABER), a literacy landscape assessment (in the case of early grade reading), a youth assessment (to have a clearer picture of various dimensions of youth development), a labor market assessment (for youth workforce programs), or an education needs assessment in the case of an emergency (Global Education Cluster) can inform the design of an activity or program. In the context of this aspect of needs assessment, seek to understand the nature of existing social and emotional programming. There are no existing assessments that can serve as a model, so an implementing partner will need to design one from scratch; elements likely include document review (including policies, plans, curricula, frameworks, teacher training materials), data review (if data on social and emotional skill development already exist), and interviews with learners, educators, administrators, or community members participating in existing social and emotional programs.

Basic physical or financial needs. Learners and educators can experience distress when they do not have their basic needs met or lack access to critical services. Particularly in settings characterized by conflict and crisis, a basic education program may look at reports or secondary data from a multi-sector assessment, like a Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment, in order to prioritize and plan needed referrals for learners, educators, or their families. Food security, shelter, cash distributions, or other types of programs may better meet their physical or financial needs, reducing their distress and improving their ability to attend and benefit from basic education programs.

A Rapid Education and Risk Analysis collects information on the contextual risks that impact the education sector, learners, and communities to inform decisions regarding the design, adaptation and/or delivery of an education program that is sensitive to various contextual risks and does not contribute to conflict dynamics or disaster vulnerabilities, and where possible builds social cohesion and resilience. The 2018 Cox’s Bazar Rapid Education and Risk Analysis recommended that teachers be trained on social-emotional learning, based on survey results that found fissures in social cohesion and increases in social disorder stemming from the integration of refugee students into Bangladeshi schools. Nearly a third of all interviews mentioned that tension and quarrels were problematic in their areas.

6.2 Identify and Engage Stakeholders

The 2018 USAID Education Policy names country-focus and ownership as a key principle of education programming. Besides a principle of good development, identifying and engaging stakeholders over the course of implementing a basic education program that prioritizes social and emotional programming increases the likelihood that the program will have deep contextual and cultural relevance, a core principle of social and emotional programming. A USAID implementing partner should conduct a stakeholder analysis or system diagnostic to identify the key champions, mediators, influencers, and potential adversaries within the formal or non-formal education or training system.

Implementing partners should consider stakeholders at the ministry, national, and regional levels, while also prioritizing stakeholders at the local level, including teachers, learners, parents, and community and religious leaders. At the ministry level, consider going beyond the Ministries of Education or Higher Education, and consult ministries that oversee youth, labor, gender, child protection, social work, or health. At the local level, prioritize input data from learners (particularly youth), teachers, facilitators, coaches, mentors, and administrators in contextualizing programming and in choosing social and emotional skills. When engaging stakeholders, Missions should consider social, religious, and cultural values. Faith-based organizations should be potential partners when contextualizing skills to understand
religious values and beliefs and the role of religion in prioritizing and contextualizing skills. Consider creating a journey map that illustrates all of the people who affect learners’ lives and educational experience in order to identify the most knowledgeable stakeholders at the local level. Note that in a conflict-affected or post-conflict setting, relevant stakeholders and their institutions may change frequently, and relevant ministries may have been weakened if a conflict lasted many years.

### TABLE 4: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MATRIX EXAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESIGN OR IMPLEMENTATION PHASE</th>
<th>POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy (Section 5.1)</td>
<td>USAID Mission</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner government (or those in charge of ensuring learners have access to social and emotional skill development opportunities in a given context)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multilateral partners (e.g. UNICEF)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ministries of Education (local and national level)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donor agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious officials (depending on the country)</td>
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<td>Universities</td>
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<td>Context (Section 5.2)</td>
<td>The RERA Tool 6 can help to determine key stakeholders for engaging in contextual analysis</td>
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<td>Goal (Section 5.3)</td>
<td>USAID Office of Education</td>
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<td>Ministries of Education (local and national level)</td>
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<td>Implementation (Section 6)</td>
<td>Ministry of Education (local and national level)</td>
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<td>Learners</td>
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<td>Youth, youth-led, and youth-serving organizations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Parents/caregivers</td>
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<td>Community elders</td>
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<td>Teachers/facilitators</td>
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<td>Coaches/mentors</td>
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<td>Faith-based organizations</td>
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<td>Universities or post-secondary teacher training institutions</td>
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6.3 Create, Validate, or Update a Theory of Change

Building social and emotional skills may stand alone as the purpose or result of an education activity, may stand with other learning outcomes or skills (e.g. literacy or a technical skill), or may be an important step on the pathway to another cross-sectoral purpose (e.g. civic engagement, employment). The role of social and emotional skills within a theory of change can highlight the most relevant entry points.

Theories of change should be grounded in the available evidence, aim to generate new evidence for the learning priorities highlighted in the 2019 USAID Social Emotional Learning and Soft Skills Education Policy Brief, and reflect the Positive Youth Development Framework if appropriate. Implementing partners should contextualize the theory of change and translate the best-available evidence in partnership with local stakeholders.

The logic model or results framework should also identify how the learning environment and teachers, instructors, faculty, or caregivers reinforce the positive development of prioritized skills. A good quality theory of change will reflect the social-ecological model. Again, the environment that a learner lives and learns within influences their social and emotional skill development. Use the social-ecological framework to analyze how a program or activity may operate at different levels of a learner’s social, education, household, or community environment in order to create an effective program or activity.

USAID may either publish a theory of change in a request for proposals or request for applications, or it can ask for an implementing partner to propose a theory of change as part of the instructions for a bid, which is then co-created, refined, validated, or evaluated over the course of the implementation of a project or activity. In countries where a partner ministry has already identified social and emotional learning priorities or clearly defined skills within a curriculum or measurement framework, an activity-level theory of change should reflect these skills and outcomes. In contexts where relevant frameworks for teaching and learning in basic education do not reflect social and emotional learning, a USAID Mission and implementing partner should consider co-creating a theory of change with key stakeholders as part of an inception phase of an activity. This may also provide a meaningful process for creating local support for or buy-in to social and emotional learning or reinforcing USAID Mission objectives linked to education system strengthening.

6.4 Identify, Prioritize, Define, and Contextualize Social and Emotional Skills

Identify social and emotional skills. As part of the strategic planning process, USAID should have reviewed national or local policies, plans, curriculum, frameworks, or standards and benchmarks to determine whether they have already identified or prioritized any social and emotional skills or competencies.

USAID defines a theory of change as a narrative description, usually accompanied by a graphic or visual depiction, that describes how and why a purpose or result is expected to be achieved in a particular context. (ADS 201)

The UNICEF Framework on Transferable Skills provides a guide for identifying and defining skills from four competency areas: life-long learning, employability and entrepreneurship, personal empowerment, and active citizenship. The framework report provides a list of skills to choose from that have international, regional, or national relevance.
If USAID did not complete this analysis, then the implementing partner should as part of activity implementation. Following this analysis, an implementing partner should have enough information to plan the time and level of effort needed for further prioritization, definition, and contextualization of the skills.

If existing documents or programs do not reference or address social and emotional skills, USAID recommends that implementing partners begin with a contextualization process, and then return to prioritization and definition of social and emotional skills. For example, implementing partners may find it helpful to ask questions like: What cultural norms or values exist in the local context? Does the culture place more emphasis and value on communalism or individualism? What traits do stakeholders value most? The answers to these questions may identify traits like kindness or respectfulness. Implementing partners then should ask what skills build and develop these traits. This should generate a large list of culturally and contextually relevant social and emotional skills that an implementing partner can further prioritize, define, and contextualize as needed.

**Prioritize social and emotional skills.** The holistic nature of social and emotional skills means that a USAID-funded activity likely cannot address all of the skills that a successful learner possesses. Thus, an activity should prioritize a feasible number of social and emotional skills to address, that make sense in combination with each other, have cultural and contextual relevance, and support the theory of change.

In order to prioritize the social and emotional skills that have the most contextual and cultural relevance and support the theory of change, an implementing partner may work with stakeholders to answer the following questions:

- What does a successful learner look like in this context?
- What kinds of behaviors, skills, attitudes, mindsets, or beliefs distinguish a successful learner from an unsuccessful learner?
- What skills are necessary to be successful at (outcomes of the activity)?

**Define social and emotional skills.** Once an activity has prioritized skills, the implementing partner and stakeholders should define these skills. USAID recommends that an implementing partner co-creates definitions with local stakeholders, such as administrators, teachers, and learners. As part of the definitions, identify what the skill is, how it connects to other skills (e.g. does it reinforce another skill, does it come before or after other skills, at what age could a learner have the developmental capacity to learn the skill), and its value from the perspective of multiple stakeholders. When possible, bring all stakeholders together to validate the skills and their definitions, including government, administrators, teachers, faith-based organizations, and families. Co-creating a single shared definition of each skill will set the foundation for monitoring and measurement as well as designing or implementing interventions.

**Contextualize social and emotional skills.** Successful social and emotional learning programs have relevance for learners, educators, and their families. Consequently, USAID recommends that all activities plan and budget time and effort for this process.

Contextualization refers not just to adapting language or examples, but ensuring that the definitions of skills, and resulting frameworks or interventions reflect the cultural and social environment, values and various perspectives. For example, a study conducted in Tanzania found that though teachers and
parents had similar ideas about what social skills or attributes a learner needs to succeed in life (e.g. sociable, cooperative, attentive listener, obedient), they varied about what kinds of skills or attributes a learner needs to succeed in school. Teachers, unlike parents, emphasized the importance of curiosity. At every step of contextualization, reflect on cultural bias, assumptions, and privilege using a processing tool, such as the EquityXDesign Equity Pause. Missions and implementing partners must be conscious of the implicit and explicit biases that they may bring in as stakeholders, especially if they try to adapt or contextualize Western-developed frameworks or approaches for use in other parts of the world. Yet, within a country, a ministry partner may also have an implicit or explicit bias or preference for a specific religious, moral, or cultural framing, definition, or choice of social and emotional skills. USAID Missions and implementing partners should be prepared to spend adequate time on the contextualization process in order to assure that the USAID-funded activity does not perpetuate a view of some religions or cultures within a country as less valuable or worse.

Contextualization processes can run rapidly, in as little as two weeks, or can run throughout the pilot phase of any project or activity. Align the amount of time and effort that can support contextualization with the complexity of the social and emotional components of the basic education program. For example, in the context of an activity that needs to begin implementation with a very limited inception period, implementing partners could consider using social and emotional kernels of practice, which Jones, Bailey, Brush, & Kahn (2017) define as “low-cost, targeted strategies which [...] represent the essential ‘active ingredients’ in the more comprehensive programs we know to be effective. By design, kernels target a specific behavior (one that occurs many times or few per day) and can be taught quickly.” (p2)

Identifying and prioritizing social and emotional skills and contextualizing and defining skills often happens concurrently, not sequentially. The final list of prioritized social and emotional skills may result from contextualization activities (i.e. meeting with stakeholders) or may derive from an existing framework used by the Ministry of Education or other local stakeholders. If an implementing partner finds that one or more lists of specific social and emotional skills already exist, assess and validate the extent to which they have cultural and contextual

Contextualization helps ‘do no harm’. Some social and emotional programs and curricula reflect patriarchal, colonial values that deem certain cultural practices as not acceptable or valuable require that children and youth conform to the aforementioned values, behaviors, and beliefs. Translating social and emotional practices without contextualization can cause harm. Children and youth might feel discouraged and internalize negative feelings about themselves and their culture if the messages they receive do not validate their experiences. To mitigate the risk that social and emotional education programs devalue or undermine learner’s self confidence or identity, social emotional skill development efforts should use a strengths-based approach, highlight communal and cultural strengths, practices, and values, and provide children and youth an opportunity to identify those assets that come from their own culture or background.

In response to COVID-19, Right to Play had to implement new social-emotional learning activities at a distance with a very limited inception period. The organization created simple games that could be shared and easily contextualized, such as the “Share my Feelings” game (slide 10), which can be played at school or at home, with many students or between a parent and child, and can incorporate many social-emotional competencies from different cultural contexts.
relevance for the activity’s target population. Table 5 provides an example of a validation checklist, which an implementing partner could complete alongside other key stakeholders.

**TABLE 5: VALIDATION CHECKLIST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VALIDATION QUESTIONS TO EXAMINE OR UNDERSTAND CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL RELEVANCE</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>RESOLUTION OR ACTION STEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age &amp; stage: Do these skills appropriately reflect the age and/or developmental stage of targeted beneficiaries?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language: Do these skills translate literally and figuratively into the language that targeted beneficiaries use and understand? Do all key stakeholders have shared definitions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict or crisis: Is this list of skills relevant for the shocks or stresses that learners experience in this context? Do any aspects of identity (e.g. ethnicity, race, gender, religion, legal status) that may influence the ways in which a skill is taught or expressed also intersect with the conflict or crisis dynamics?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/tribal group or clan: Do these skills have relevance for the various ethnicities or tribes that we will work with? Do any of these skills have more or less relevance for some (or only one) groups? Do these skills present in the same way across all of these groups?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race: Do these skills have relevance for the various races that we will work with? Do any of these skills have more or less relevance for some (or only one) race? Do these skills present in the same way across all races?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender: Do these skills have relevance for people who identify as male, female, transgender, or non-binary? Do these skills present in the same way across gender identities? Are any of these skills already gendered (e.g. considered “masculine” or “feminine”)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disability: Do these skills have relevance for learners or educators with a disability? Do these skills present in the same way across types of disabilities?</td>
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</table>
Designing for Equity. Social and emotional skill development can be a tool for establishing and sustaining caring, just, and inclusive schools and communities. The development of social and emotional skills fosters environments where children, youth, and adults feel like they belong, as well as respected and valued in their experiences, cultural values, and identities. While social and emotional skills alone cannot solve structural and systemic oppression, it can be used to leverage community building, create a sense of belonging, and provide the skills and strategies necessary to create safe environments.

In non-crisis situations, social and emotional skills development can be an equalizer for marginalized children and youth. Evidence suggests that social and emotional skill development in education programs that are gender and culturally sensitive can aid in reducing social and academic disparities and build a sense of belonging. Aligned with USAID’s Education Policy, equity and inclusion must be a focal point when including social and emotional skill development in basic education planning so that all learners, especially the most marginalized learners, have increased access to quality education that is safe, relevant, and promotes social wellbeing.

For marginalized and vulnerable populations, including girls, young women, learners with disabilities, and low-income learners, social and emotional skill development programming should center their experiences. Learners may face marginalization at the intersection of multiple, oppressed identities. Programs should be gender- and conflict-sensitive, culturally responsive, and use Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to create more equitable learning environments by supporting individual learning differences.

Social and emotional skill development should be designed with equity in mind at both the planning level and the implementation level. When designing basic education programs focused on social and emotional skill development, Missions and implementing partners should identify how identity, values, biases, and assumptions play a role in decision-making and implementation. EquityXDesign provides an Equity Pause tool to process and self-reflect on individual biases or beliefs that perpetuate inequality and reproduce inequitable power structures. Educators and school leaders must also participate in ongoing reflection at the school level. Educators and school leaders should ask reflection questions such as, “How can your school be a place where you feel seen, valued, and excited to learn? What supports are in place to ensure students and families are socially, emotionally, and materially supported during remote learning (and beyond)?”

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As part of contextualization and examinations of equity in social and emotional skill development, practices should build safe and inclusive learning environments for all learners, address violence, and include gender- and conflict-sensitive programming. A minimum requirement of conflict sensitive programming is to “do no harm,” which requires making decisions with an awareness of how these decisions could affect power relations and interpersonal relations.

6.5 Operationalize: Choose Feasible, Relevant Entry Points

Basic education programs have multiple entry points or components through which USAID and implementing partners can integrate social emotional skills development. A high-quality program chooses the most relevant entry points based on the prioritized skills, country context, operating environment, theory of change, activity or program objectives, and the maturity of social and emotional learning within the education system. A high-quality program chooses a reasonable number of entry points based on the implementing partner’s expertise, experience, and maturity, the country context, and other relevant activity or program objectives.

USAID implementing partners should use data collected during the needs assessment to understand which entry points, if any, have been used previously to integrate social and emotional skills development, as well as any lessons learned, and which entry points remain un- or under-utilized.

To aid in selection, this How-To-Note provides a definition, key considerations, and a short list of best practices or recommended approaches for each entry point. Key considerations are universal. Best practices are defined as effective ways, approaches, or techniques for designing and implementing basic education programs. Programs and activities should adopt as many relevant best practices as feasible. Best practices are based on the best available evidence from research as well as experience, particularly of educators. Educators know the realities of their classrooms and their learners’ capacities, and are a key stakeholder group in choosing feasible, relevant entry points. USAID Missions and implementing partners should always assess the feasibility of a best practice and plan for any barriers that might exist. When possible, this How-To Note provides effective, low-cost alternatives based on the context.

Entry Point 1: Climate of the Learning Environment

Definition: The quality and character of the learning space, school life, or the learners’, administrators’, and educators’ daily experience of their physical, social, and emotional environment. This includes relationships between peers, educators, administrators, and caregivers, as well as classroom and school management policies and practices.

Considerations: Administrators and educators should regard social and emotional skills development as an orientation to relationship-building, community-building, and self-reflection. Learning environments should be conducive to improved wellbeing and increased learning outcomes, rather than places of discouragement or danger. The learning environment should be a safe, supportive, inclusive, and positive space that welcomes all learners and is free of discrimination, violence, and abuse. A safe and supportive learning environment with positive, healthy relationships is a prerequisite for social and emotional skills development. It is important to start with a whole-school approach that actively involves all members of
the learning community to create a safe space for practicing and understanding social and emotional skills. While some programs and activities may integrate social and emotional skills development through another entry point, USAID suggests that in order for social and emotional skills development to be most effective, the climate of the learning environment must be safe, supportive, and affirming.

Best Practices:

- Take a whole-school approach to creating an accessible, safe, supportive, and inclusive learning culture by actively engaging learners, educators, administrators, and caregivers. Develop policies, programs, and partnerships that focus on healthy relationships and mutual respect, and increase accountability and reduce the impunity of those who perpetrate violence. Administrators play a significant role in creating and sustaining whole-school approaches, and should be supported in their own social and emotional skills development. They should communicate consistently that social and emotional skills development is a schoolwide priority, create opportunities for staff to learn about and practice social and emotional skills development, and align school climate policies and practices with social and emotional learning priorities.

- Social and emotional skills development often comes in the form of policies, practices, or structures related to school climate. Establish clear guidelines to ensure the physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, and sexual safety of learners and staff by creating comprehensive codes of conduct, reporting mechanisms, and referral channels. Codes of conduct should outline ethical norms and standards of acceptable behavior for staff, educators, learners, and caregivers. Reporting mechanisms should establish anonymous, learner-friendly processes for learners and educators to report issues.

Learners and staff may be hesitant to report violence or abuse out of fear of retaliation, or if there are cultural norms around violence or abuse. Legal protections should be in place to protect those who report violence or abuse. Although codes of conduct may not explicitly teach social and emotional skills development, having them in place helps children and youth learn about social expectations (social awareness), conflict resolution (relationship skills), and solving/reflecting on choices (decision-making). Children and youth learn about social norms and power dynamics from existing policies and procedures, and how those policies and procedures are enforced (and in many cases, which learners are targeted by enforcement).

- At the classroom level, positive discipline and restorative justice approaches will help establish a more welcoming environment conducive to learning. Restorative justice practices rely on relationship-centered approaches for addressing and reducing harm and collaboratively solving problems. Not only are they used as an alternative to exclusionary discipline, but also as a preventative measure for violence and conflict, through development of healthy school relationships between children, educators, staff, and administration. For example, a teacher

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may visit a student's home after a difficult week at school to make connections and foster a school-family relationship, and to solve problems collectively.

- Train educators and administrators in positive practices that can establish a more welcoming environment and reinforce social and emotional development. For example, Norwegian Refugee Council’s Better Learning Program in Palestine and Jordan is designed to improve learning conditions for children exposed to war and conflict by training and supporting educators to deliver coping skills curricula and contextually relevant psycho-social education.

- Ensure the inclusion and equal treatment of children and youth of all genders, abilities, cultures, religions, and identities in the learning environment. Recognize how discriminatory norms and unequal and inequitable power dynamics may affect relationships in the school environment and challenge educators, administrators, and learners to overcome their biases and assumptions.

- Community service initiatives may allow learners to practice social and emotional skills beyond the classroom. Service learning is defined as “a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as learners work with others through a process of applying what they are learning to community problems, and at the same time, reflecting upon their experience as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding for themselves.” The emphasis on reflection in service learning is particularly important for building empathy because it encourages self-awareness and relationship-building with a local or global community. Service learning or community service can reinforce the principles of positive youth development, because it invites youth to act as a source of change for their communities.

- In crisis and conflict settings, create a safe, stable learning environment with routine and structured activities in order to restore a sense of normality, dignity, and hope. Obtaining and building social and emotional skills is critical in contexts where children and youth are experiencing or have experienced adversity, violence, and conflict. Social and emotional skill development programming can mitigate the negative social, cognitive, or emotional consequences of adversity and, if they are inclusive and conflict-sensitive, have the potential to reduce social and academic disparities among marginalized populations. For that reason, there should be increased emphasis on adopting and implementing social and emotional skills development during crises and conflicts. Daily routines and structured activities should focus on aiding learners and educators in making sense of their experiences, while building strong relationships with one another for support, which fosters a strong sense of belonging and reinforces personal identity.

The kernels approach to social and emotional learning refers to the use of specific evidence-based strategies that are simple, flexible, and adaptable to support and reinforce social, emotional, and cognitive skills, as opposed to an entire program or curriculum. This approach may be the most feasible in a rapid onset emergency or in any context where the development of a full program or curriculum is not possible. For example, The ‘Learning in a Healing Classroom’ approach in Lebanon, Niger, and Sierra Leone engages low-cost social and emotional interventions such as mindfulness strategies and ‘Brain Games.’ Mindfulness practices are used daily, three to five minutes, three times a day, while ‘Brain Games’ consist of 30-minute weekly lessons followed by five to ten-minute activities aimed at developing memory, emotion regulation, and other social and emotional skills.
Entry Point 2: Teachers, Coaches, and Mentors

Definition: The motivation, skills, and capacity of teachers, coaches, and mentors to practice and model social and emotional skills. The ways in which coaches and mentors work directly with children and youth, or in some instances, teachers, to develop their capacities and provide the training, tools, resources, and support needed for successful skills development and instruction.

Considerations: Improving the motivation, skills, and capacity of teachers, coaches, and mentors to practice and model social and emotional skills is essential to helping children build social and emotional skills. Teachers need to be prepared with appropriate, differentiated instructional approaches and materials for the realities of the contexts in which they work and the language that learners use and understand. In some programs, coaches and mentors work directly with youth to model and develop soft skills for positive youth development and youth workforce success. In other programs, coaches and mentors work directly with teachers to develop their capacities and provide the training, tools, resources, and support needed for successful instruction. Experienced coaches and mentors may not be readily available in all contexts, so establishing peer support networks for teachers, mentors, coaches, or facilitators provides another way to support their practice and social emotional wellbeing. Ongoing support may be particularly critical in crisis and conflict contexts where teachers may be dealing with their own social and emotional trauma or stress, and where teachers lack formal training or hold varying qualifications.

Best Practices:

- **Support teachers’ own social and emotional wellbeing** and growth through professional development opportunities, such as pre-service training, in-service training, ongoing coaching support, and peer learning. Teachers need ongoing training to practice both modeling and teaching social and emotional skills. Teacher trainers, coaches, and mentors should demonstrate how to teach social and emotional skills to children and youth by modeling techniques and providing opportunities for teacher trainees to practice and reflect. Using role play activities as part of training increases affective and cognitive empathy. Ongoing coaching support should include practice sessions, classroom observations with low-stakes feedback, and opportunities where teachers can share resources, questions, and provide peer support, such as teacher learning circles. When teachers, coaches, and mentors model social and emotional skills, learners of all ages can better understand how to practice social and emotional skills for themselves.

For example, as part of the Millennium Challenge Corporation-funded Strengthening the National Education System Program in El Salvador, FHI 360 is strengthening the social-emotional capacity of teachers through targeted social-emotional learning strategies and mindfulness practices to reduce stress levels and increase effectiveness of classroom management. The program first develops teachers’ intrapersonal social emotional competencies (i.e. mindful awareness), before moving to interpersonal competencies (i.e. compassion, connectedness) and classroom strategies.

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19 The term “teachers” includes all educators, including instructional staff in both formal and non-formal settings.

• Leverage and build on teachers’ existing attitudes, beliefs, understanding, and values about social and emotional skills, and recognize their role in the instruction and practice of those skills. Doing this successfully also requires teachers to reflect on their own biases and identify how these may influence their teaching of social and emotional skills. Before adopting new instructional practices to teach social and emotional skills, teachers will benefit from seeing how their current practices may already be supporting the development of social and emotional learning. It is also important to understand what will motivate teachers to change their behavior and teaching practices. Some teachers may be motivated by understanding how social and emotional learning supports the short- and long-term success of their learners. Other teachers may be motivated by the role that social and emotional skills development may play in classroom management or their students’ performance on summative or high-stakes tests.

• Train teachers in social and emotional practices that are SAFE—Sequenced, Active, Focused, and Explicit. Social and emotional skills development activities should be sequenced and led in a coordinated and connected way that enables young people to practice and master new skills. Specific skills should be explicitly defined and targeted with focused instructional time.

• Teachers, mentors, and coaches should be trained to identify and reflect on power, privilege, and bias, especially as it relates to social and emotional skills development. Training should incorporate opportunities to examine and understand different cultural values and traditions and provide strategies to contextualize social and emotional skills through a student-centered approach.

• Teachers should prioritize developing positive, warm, and supportive relationships with their learners. Allowing space and freedom for practicing different types of communication in the classroom allows learners to feel valued and heard. When learners feel supported and cared for, they look forward to coming to school and strive to stay in school and perform well.21

For example, the Young Emanzi Toolkit for Mentoring Adolescent Boys and Young Men uses a conceptual model focused on a safe and secure learning environment, mentorship, and social connections. Mentors are trained in how to help mentees build relationships and feel comfortable with one another, and how to serve as a trusted teacher and role model in order to help mentees identify solutions for their problems by learning from each other.

• When possible, align teacher competency frameworks with social and emotional curriculum standards. Teacher competency frameworks include a number of competencies, knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable educators to develop and sustain effective teaching practices. These competencies can align with definitions of social and emotional skills. For example, competency frameworks can measure and assess teacher competency in perspective-taking, appreciating diversity, employing culturally responsive pedagogy, managing stress, and problem solving.

• Train teachers to identify signs of mental health problems, child abuse, neglect, and exploitation, so they may refer learners to more specialized services when needed. While social and emotional intervention can help to mitigate some of the harmful effects of crises and conflicts by promoting coping strategies and protective factors, social and emotional interventions are not clinical or specialized mental health services, and should not be treated as such. Referral

mechanisms to specialized mental health services must be put in place when implementing social and emotional skills in basic education programming (see section 2.2. for more information on mental health services).

Entry Point 3: Out-of-School Environment

Definition: The quality and character of a learners’ life outside of school and/or learning environments. The out-of-school environment can refer to, but is not limited to, extra-curricular activities and non-curricular experiences, as well as interactions with parents, caregivers, and communities, where learners spend much of their time.

Considerations: What happens outside of the learning environment has a significant impact on learners’ social and emotional skills development. Children and youth may face insecurity, violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect in the home or community environment. The ways in which learners, their families, and communities adapt to, absorb, or transform in the face of adversity can influence social and emotional skills and academic outcomes. Key community interventions can raise the awareness and capacity of parents, caregivers, teachers, health care workers, social workers, faith and community leaders, and children and youth themselves. After-school or out-of-school activities, including extra-curricular activities, can equally influence social and emotional and academic skills. During emergencies, learning environments are often outside of the classroom.

Best Practices:

- Scale-up evidence-based, culturally appropriate caregiving programs that promote loving, nurturing care; support the mental health and wellbeing of caregivers, including parents and elders; and address issues such as conflict in relationships, intimate-partner violence, and support for girls’ education. When parents or elders create living environments where children, especially marginalized learners, including girls, young women, and learners with disabilities, feel emotionally, intellectually, and physically safe, children can practice social and emotional skills and feel empowered to speak about their emotions, exhibit empathy, and demonstrate self-efficacy. Social and emotional skills development begins in early childhood, so investing in positive programming for families and early childcare is important for long-term development.23

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22 The term “out-of-school” refers to activities and spaces outside of the learning environment; for the purposes of this How-to Note, the term does NOT refer to children and youth who are not currently enrolled in education.

• Use data from a gender analysis in order to design home- or community-based social and emotional programs that encourage more equitable participation of both men and women and promote more equitable gender norms.

• Partner with religious and faith-based institutions, community groups, and youth organizations to support extra-curricular activities, such as clubs, sports, art, and camps, that provide children and youth the opportunity to strengthen relationships and develop and utilize new social and emotional skills. Note that participation does not always equal skills building; curriculum and instruction within extra-curricular activities must still be active, accessible, explicit, equitable, inclusive, and sequenced.

**The arts can serve as social and emotional experiences** that develop particular social-emotional skills, such as empathy, communication, and self-awareness. For all children and youth, particularly for those who experience adversity or are in conflict situations, culturally grounded practices like art can foster a sense of belonging, social connectedness, and an opportunity to process emotions, such as grief. For example, by practicing a theatre skit or play, learners must step into the emotions and thoughts of a character to be able to play the role. As part of that practice, learners must be able to name and identify emotions. They must also focus on memorizing lines and listening to others to know when to deliver their own lines. Art, music, theater, and literature that are indigenous to a place or people can offer already contextualized opportunities for social and emotional learning.

**Evidence shows that social and emotional skills development** routines and other brief activities are a good starting point for out-of-school programs to integrate social and emotional learning into current programming. Some of these rituals included having a welcoming activity, group work where learners worked together, and a closing activity, where learners reflected on what they learned that day.

• Seek out innovative digital platforms for delivering social and emotional programming to educators, learners, and caregivers. For example, in response to the social and emotional learning needs of children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, Norwegian Refugee Council’s **Better Learning Program** created online self-directed learning materials, provided psychosocial support messages to parents via WhatsApp, and created a mobile application to train educators and caregivers to enhance the wellbeing of their students.

However, when promoting digital platforms, it is equally important to increase caregivers’ awareness of both the value and risks of online and mobile access for children and youth, to reduce their exposure to disturbing or potentially harmful content and to prevent exploitation.

• In the midst of a crisis or conflict, the work of education may move to communities or homes. Distance learning can continue to provide educational opportunities even when learning institutions are closed. **Distance learning modalities**, such as radio/audio, video/television, mobile phone programming, and online learning can be implemented. The first step of implementation is to identify the immediate and long-term needs for distance learning and ensure that the needs of the most marginalized learners are at the center of the needs assessment. Additionally, there should be increased emphasis on providing training and support for both educators.

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caregivers to manage their own stress in conflict-ridden situations because they are critical partners in ensuring safe and supportive immediate environments for children. Likewise, additional support should be provided to teachers as schools and learning spaces prepare to reopen to ensure that teachers can support children in overcoming the fear, anxiety, and stress they may be feeling as they return to the classroom.

- Coordinate with other sectors and donors to strengthen child-welfare and child-protection systems, and support key government ministries to lead integrated responses to prevent, respond to, and protect children and youth from all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

- Invest in social and emotional skills development as a key component of non-formal learning and vocational training for children and youth not currently enrolled in formal education. For example, USAID partnered with Questscope, an Amman-based international non-governmental organization that is focused on youth social and emotional skill development, and the Ministry of Education in Jordan to develop a 24-month non-formal education program. The program offered a pathway back to formal education. Questscope’s non-formal education program is grounded in participatory methods, which engage learners in learner-centered pedagogy, where learners are encouraged to share, contribute their experiences, and teach as integral parts of the learning process. Participatory learning can be a powerful learning tool for youth in non-formal learning environments.

- Incorporate opportunities for social and emotional skills development across the lifespan (early childhood through adulthood) by creating social and emotional skills development pipelines. For example, the Escuela Amiga program in Peru works across multiple ministries, focused on social and emotional skills development to build school-community relations. As part of the curriculum, there is a section on “personal development” for learners in pre-K-11th grade. In another example, both mentors and youth in the Honduras Empleando Futuros program are trained in soft skills development to provide realistic and sustainable opportunities for youth employment and improve mentorship capacity and effectiveness.

Entry Point 4: Pedagogical and Instructional Approaches

**Definition:** The specific strategies, practices, processes, or approaches that educators (formal or non-formal) use to provide active, sequenced, explicit, focused instruction.

**Considerations:** Children learn social and emotional skills through ongoing practice and reflection. Teachers should use cooperative learning strategies, play-based activities, educational games, problem-based learning, and classroom community-building routines, so children have opportunities to work in groups, resolve conflict, think critically and creatively, and express emotions. Pedagogical strategies involve creating routines to reinforce stability in the classroom, especially in crises and conflict settings. Pedagogy should also provide opportunities for reflection by asking thoughtful group discussion and individual questions. Instructional approaches should be appropriately sequenced, active, focused, equitable, and explicit.

Culturally responsive teaching leverages and utilizes the cultural learning tools that learners bring with them to the classroom, which can, as an added benefit, supplement curriculum that lacks adequate
representation of children and youth’s cultures and languages. Children and youth gain a sense of self- and social-awareness within the context of culture. Educators might employ culturally responsive practices in the classroom by encouraging learners to share stories from their families or communities, as well as bringing literature from other cultures so learners can relate their experiences to others.

Best Practices:

- Pedagogy and instruction should incorporate activities, routines, reflections, and group work that introduce, build, and model social and emotional skills in developmentally appropriate ways. For example, daily routines, such as talking circles, can be used to build relationships. Talking circles are a key strategy for social emotional development because of the perspective-taking, reflection, decision-making, and exercising of empathy that is involved.

- Social and emotional skills should be developed according to age-appropriate milestones. Brain science suggests:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 5 and 6</td>
<td>Children begin to understand rules and directions, relate to peers, and engage in more imaginative play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 7 and 8</td>
<td>Children fully understand rules, build deeper relationships with peers, and act on responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 9 and 10</td>
<td>Peer groups become increasingly important in development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children will start to make independent decisions, and the support of adults and caregivers is important in building self-confidence and self-assurance. During adolescence, social interactions become more complex, such as building new friendships and long-lasting relationships. A positive relationship with an adult, such as a caregiver or educator, can help adolescents make independent decisions and process those decisions.

For youth, pedagogical practices such as mentoring younger learners are key tools to engage social networks in the brain. In classrooms where there are younger and older learners who may be at different developmental stages, educators should provide differentiated instruction, such as imaginative play for younger learners and mentoring opportunities for older learners.

- Incorporate opportunities for arts-based lessons for children and youth to express feelings and emotions that might be difficult to verbalize, especially in times of conflict or violence. For instance, Colegio del Cuerpo de Cartagena de Indias in Colombia uses dance to present the body as a vessel of art and to reclaim it from violence.

• **Build in time throughout the day to engage in short, daily mindfulness exercises that are culturally rooted**, such as being attentive to present sensations or building awareness of feelings and emotions.

• Educational practices like “think-pair-share” activities can build self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. “Think-pair-shares” encourage learners to think of a solution to a question on their own first, and then with another student to discuss and gain a different perspective. Together, children and youth share their solutions with the class.

• **Use play-based daily routines like “Brain Games” that use movement and play to increase executive functioning skills**, such as working memory and attention, and reinforce learning. Play-based learning provides unstructured time to explore and be creative. **According to The LEGO Foundation**, “The scientific community has found increasing evidence that infants and children are constantly learning, connecting and engaging with their surroundings through positive playful experiences. Play has a critical and crucial role in learning and in preparing children for challenges in childhood and throughout adulthood. Regardless of whether a play activity falls closer to free play, guided play or games with a particular learning goal, a critical requirement is that children must experience agency and be supported rather than directed.”

• Ask learners follow up questions about their thoughts and opinions on the content of a lesson, and why they have those thoughts and opinions. This helps learners practice communication, self-efficacy, and peer listening, and encourages positive identity development. For example, educators can provide emotional support as learners draw personal connections to a text by asking questions like, “If you were the character, how would you feel? What decision would you make? Why do you think the character did what they did? Do you see any similarities to your own experiences in this text?”

• Large class sizes are common in conflict and crisis-affected contexts, particularly in refugee camps. Tailoring content to individual learners may not be feasible. Educators can use other strategies that encourage learners to take stock of their progress on their own, such as weekly surveys. Educators can also use the daily tasks of classroom or school management to create a deeper sense of community and allow learners to practice decision-making. For example, have learners select specific roles based on their interests and skills, such as helping other learners catch up, keeping time, or opening or closing the session. These techniques can reinforce to learners the importance of their roles and what they mean to the educational community.

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Use Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies to support the full inclusion of learners with disabilities by providing multiple means of engagement with social and emotional skills, including the incorporation of access points that begin with student interests. See here for how to apply UDL strategies to literacy programs.

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Entry Point 5: Curriculums, Texts, and Materials

**Definition:** Curriculums lay out educational content standards that should be covered at specific grade or learning levels. Educational texts and materials include anything used for effective teaching and learning, whether face-to-face or at a distance, synchronous or asynchronous.

**Considerations:** Similar to any other subject, educators need social-emotional curriculum guides that clearly lay out sequential content standards, and learners need quality, contextualized, and appropriately leveled texts and materials. Social and emotional competencies and lessons should be scaffolded within curriculums, texts and materials. Textbooks and other materials must be in a language of instruction that learners and educators use and understand. Materials and texts that reflect learners’ backgrounds and experiences are vital for engagement and deep learning. Curriculums and materials must be gender- and conflict-sensitive, as well as structured and designed to reduce or eliminate barriers for marginalized learners, such as children and youth with disabilities.

A quality social and emotional learning program must go further than modifying or updating curriculums, texts, or materials because social and emotional skills develop through modeling from adults or peers, ongoing practice, and feedback or reflection in a physically and emotionally safe environment. Social and emotional skills can be integrated into existing instructional curriculums and materials to build certain skills (e.g. empathy, self awareness) or as pedagogical processes through which content is taught (e.g. reading discussion groups where the teacher instructs students on how to take turns and respond to each other’s opinions, in addition to the reading lesson).

**Best Practices:**

- Wherever possible, engage administrators, educators, and caregivers to adapt curriculums, texts, and materials to the local context, utilizing local languages, definitions, examples, and stories. Include educators’ perspectives in the development and contextualization of social and emotional skill building activities and materials. They know the realities of their classrooms and their learners’ capacities best and are a key stakeholder in developing instructional content and material.

- Integrate social and emotional content into existing curriculums and textbooks. Many existing textbooks and curricular materials include content that considers emotions, navigates a dilemma or challenge, discusses a societal issue, or addresses interpersonal relationships. Educators can explicitly discuss these situations as social-emotional skills. Educators can ask questions such as: Does the lesson involve dialogue or discussion that might stir debate? Does the material require reflection about making a choice or decision? Educators can make decisions about how to draw content out of the lesson that may require learners to reflect, write about their feelings, or engage in dialogue to hear others’ perspectives.

For example, **USAID’s YouthPower Action** developed a literacy curriculum to provide youth ages 15-17 with remedial instruction. This curriculum builds youth reading and writing skills with a focus on vocabulary, spelling, fluency, comprehension, and how to organize and structure text. The curriculum is designed around soft skills and topics of interest to this age group, including

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personal development (goal setting and self-awareness), health and safety, citizenship, communication, understanding the labor market, financial literacy, and problem solving.

- Develop materials and texts that are inclusive and equitable, and that reflect the culture and identities of all learners in the learning environment. Materials must also be appropriate for the developmental level of the learners and available in their local languages. For more information and resources on high-quality texts in languages children use and understand, utilize the Global Book Alliance. Lee & Low Books provides an exemplar list of books in English for a variety of ages on various aspects of social and emotional learning that feature different cultures and races.

Illustrations, story books, and play-based approaches can support the development of social and emotional skills at a young age. The content of the story book or illustration should include characters and plots that discuss topics related to social and emotional skills development, such as processing emotions, making decisions, or understanding self-identity.

Learners who participate in readers’ theatre, where children’s literature is transformed into active lessons in which learners read or recite lines from the text, better grasp the content and enhance reading skills for learners at multiple reading levels. Readers’ theatre particularly helps learners develop empathy, a key social and emotional skill.

Textbooks can use stories and narratives to build emotional engagement and illustrate healthy social and emotional skills at an older age. Role plays of historical figures in the classroom can build on historical empathy, where youth and older learners examine the perspectives and values of those in the past while considering how the circumstances they were in might have shifted their decisions to be different from those we would make today.

Educators can use strategies such as highlighting and amplifying stories from history that have often been left out of textbooks, like the stories of young leaders or leaders from their communities. Supplemental reading materials can provide educators with discussion questions to further engage learners to identify and practice different skills.

- Develop standards for evaluating educational materials for developmentally and age-appropriate social and emotional content, both positive and negative. Standards could examine each competency of social and emotional skills building (e.g. self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making) in both curriculum and pedagogy. For example, does the text address cross-cultural activities and discuss differences through an asset-based lens? Does the text model or describe a range of personal emotions and regard all emotions as valid?

Entry Point 6: Education Systems Strengthening

**Definition:** The process of identifying, designing, and implementing policies and practices in the education system, public and private, formal and non-formal, so that a country can better meet the educational or learning needs of children and youth.

**Considerations:** The 2018 USAID Education Policy emphasizes the importance of strengthening education systems and building the capacity of local institutions. Programs must start with an understanding of each country’s education system, priorities, and desired outcomes in order to design strategies that can be sustainably implemented. Collaborating with a broad range of stakeholders at the local, regional, and national level, and across both the public and private sector, is key to sustaining measurable improvements in learning and educational outcomes.

**Best Practices:**

- Strengthen the capacity of national, regional, and local civil society and education authorities, including academic partners, to conduct needs assessments and administer social and emotional learning programs. Engage stakeholders with different cultural, political, and technical expertise to develop and strengthen policies, standards, resources, and capacities across the system.

- Connect school safety and climate policies and practices to social-emotional learning policies and practices. Safe learning environments should be a priority that is directly related to creating the learning conditions necessary for social emotional and skills development.

- Recognize how social and cultural norms can influence the ways different social and emotional skills are understood and prioritized among different stakeholders. Work with local education groups that include partner governments, academia, civil society organizations, parents and caregivers, teachers’ organizations, the private sector, learners, and other donors to prioritize specific skills and contextualize social and emotional competencies at various levels of the education system.

- Support education actors to understand and value social and emotional skills by raising awareness on the evidence linking social and emotional development to a broad range of positive educational and behavioral outcomes for children and youth.

- Examine how the Ministry of Education interacts with other government institutions, such as the ministries of health, gender, sports, culture, higher education, and social services, and consider their role in program and activity implementation. Collaborate with other ministries to create referral channels and appropriate provision of services that connect children, youth, and teachers to needed health, justice, social, or protective services.

- Support education systems to build monitoring systems, set age-appropriate benchmarks, and increase use of social and emotional skills data in school and education system management. **Assessment at the school level should incorporate adult/teacher competencies, school climate data (e.g. number of behavioral infractions and how they were handled), and other learner outcomes, such as achievement data.**

- Identify sustainable cost structures, improve financial management, and leverage innovative financing to support social and emotional educational activities.
• **Partner with higher education institutions** to increase their role in preparing the teacher workforce, conducting and applying research, delivering quality education, and engaging with communities around social and emotional learning.\(^3\(^5\)\)

• Higher education institutions can build the social and emotional skills of educators and teacher educators to foster inclusive classroom and school environments. **School-university-family partnership frameworks** are promising collaborations for how schools, families, and communities can work collectively as spheres of influence for overall academic success and wellbeing.\(^3\(^6\)\)

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7. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

This section provides recommendations for how to get the most useful data about social and emotional skills development at the learner level for program implementation (including rapid pivots), management, performance, accountability, and learning.

7.1 Choosing an Assessment or Tool

The best assessment or tool fits the measurement purpose, captures the identified social and emotional skills in a valid and reliable way, reflects the cultural and social context, and is feasible. The field of social and emotional learning, including measurement, continues to grow rapidly in international contexts. Thus, a basic education program likely will use a social and emotional assessment or tool that meets some, but not all, of these criteria equally well.

Assessments or tools should fit the measurement purpose. In social and emotional programming, tools or assessments can be used for tracking learners, diagnosing/screening learners, providing a situational analysis, monitoring social and emotional skills or related outcomes, evaluating the learning environment, assessing the quality of instructional practice, or evaluating the relationship between a program or intervention and social and emotional outcomes.

Basic education programs should seek to use strengths-based approaches for assessment, so tools designed for tracking or diagnosis/screening will rarely be appropriate because they use a deficit approach, and seek to place or connect a learner with specific supports or services. However, screening or diagnostics assessments or tools may be useful in pre-primary education or special education programs that can connect learners with therapeutic services outside of the education sector.

Assessments or tools should capture skills in a valid and reliable way. Unlike academic assessments, social and emotional tools or assessments have not undergone the same large-scale validity and reliability testing and analysis. However, many assessments or tools do have validity and reliability data available. When reviewing these kinds of data, check for the country context, the age/stage of learner, and the purpose for which the tool or assessment was validated.

Assessments or tools should reflect the cultural and social context. Cultural adaptation of a social and emotional assessment or tool requires resources and skill beyond translation. A universal social and emotional assessment or tool does not exist, and there are no off-the-shelf options. If a basic education program chooses a tool or assessment that has never been used with a particular group of learners, at a minimum the program should plan for rigorous translation and back-translation, modifying the wording or prompts, and updating or replacing the examples together with experts in the language and the culture. Additional work may include modifying or replacing the response options, changing the structure, or changing the content. USAID and implementing partners should anticipate updating the tool as part of the Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting Plan. If the assessment or tool would benefit other actors in the country or the region, USAID and implementing partners should consider completing and publishing the relevant validity and reliability studies, adding the data to USAID’s Development Data Library, and adding the tool to the INEE Measurement Library.
Assessments or tools should be feasible. Assessments or tools that use self-report, peer-rating, adult-rating (e.g. parent, educator), or behavioral observations and demonstrations can all be used to capture the nature or growth of social and emotional skills. Basic education programs should prioritize tools that staff, educators, administrators, or community members can administer in the natural environment of the program.

Data collected should be added to USAID’s Development Data Library. USAID considers data a public good that should be shared with a global audience, while safeguarding privacy, security, and confidentiality. As expressed in its Operational Policy, USAID encourages the broad use of data by partners, academic and scientific communities, and the public at large. Making data accessible, discoverable, and usable fuels innovation, improves program design and implementation, and ultimately, empowers the students, schools, and communities we see.

### TABLE 6: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR IDENTIFYING OR CHOOSING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILL ASSESSMENTS OR TOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESOURCE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISEE Measure Guidance: Choosing and Contextualizing Assessment Measures in Educational Contexts</td>
<td>A step-by-step decision-making guide for researchers and practitioners interested in using measures that capture holistic learning and development in emergency contexts. The guidance helps users make decisions about how to choose, contextualize, and implement reliable and valid measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring Soft &amp; Life Skills in International Youth Development Programs: A Review and Inventory of Tools</td>
<td>A summary of findings from a review and inventory of tools that measure cross-cutting skills, based on key criteria for use by international youth development programs. Authors provide general findings about the universe of skill measurement tools reviewed, as well as specific observations about tools that scored highest against the review criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The INEE Measurement Library</td>
<td>A collection of measurement tools to assess children’s learning and holistic development and service provider quality in crisis contexts. The measures have been vetted and tested by members of the 3EA Middle East and North Africa Consortium. Measures and assessments are accompanied by details on validity and reliability, guidance materials, and training materials. N.B. most of these tools focus on children, rather than youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL and PSS Measurement and Assessment Tools in Education in Emergencies</td>
<td>This is a mapping of the various tools in use in education in emergencies programming that captures SEL or PSS outcomes at the learner level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The RAND Assessment Finder</td>
<td>A list of 200+ social and emotional competency assessments. The Assessment Finder enables practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to explore what assessments are available and obtain key information about what they are designed to measure, how they operate, what demands they place on learners and educators, and the uses of their data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The CASEL SEL Assessment guide and resources</td>
<td>This guide and compendium of resources helps the user understand more about SEL measurement, select a framework, and then choose and implement measures accordingly. It provides insights and user experience from school districts and policymakers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the How-To Note emphasizes, what happens to learners outside of the learning environment influences the growth and trajectory of social and emotional skills. Basic education programs, particularly in any conflict- or crisis-affected area, should identify and monitor elements of the context that may serve as protective or promotive factors that encourage or support social and emotional skill development or shocks and stresses that undermine social and emotional skill development. Data from a Rapid Education and Risk Analysis or a Safe Learning Environments Assessment can provide insight into
which physical, emotional, social, or other hazards, shocks, or stresses may make sense to monitor, in order to inform implementation (e.g. intensify or reinforce social and emotional program elements in specific areas of implementation) or contextualize results (e.g. endline data collection occurred within a month or two of a local crisis). Secondary or administrative data at the school or classroom level, such as data on threats to safety, code of conduct violations, or disciplinary measures, can provide valuable information about the environment in which a basic education program runs.

**Context monitoring** is also a key strategy for adaptive management.

### 7.2 Performance Monitoring

Currently, USAID has one Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator and two custom indicators that capture the growth of social and emotional skills at three key ages and stages. USAID does not privilege a particular assessment or tool. The indicators are:

- **EG.6-13**: Percent of individuals with improved soft skills following participation in USG-assisted programs
- **Supp-I**: Percent of pre-primary learners with improved early learning skills following participation in USG-assisted programs
- **Supp-9**: Percent of learners with improved social and emotional skills, as locally defined, following participation in USG-assisted programs (see Annex 1)

Data about the social and emotional skills or growth of learners can come from assessments or tools that rely on self-report, peer-rating, educator/parent-rating, or behavioral observations or tests. Social and emotional competencies grow over time, so assessments or tools should reflect the age and stage of the target population. Because the out-of-school environment heavily influences social and emotional skill development, USAID Missions and implementing partners should consider how best to use context or sentinel indicators in order to understand the ways in which the growth of these competencies may be affected by the shocks and stressors that learners or educators experience.

This table maps some existing Standard Foreign Assistance Indicators and USAID Office of Education custom indicators to each of the programmatic entry points. Information about reporting on basic education programs, including social and emotional competencies, comes from the [USAID Education Reporting Toolkit](#), the [USAID SEL website](#), or the Education in Conflict and Crisis Network’s recommended indicators on [safety](#) or [conflict-sensitive education](#).

Finally, consider whether the key stakeholders may benefit from data produced by [complexity-aware monitoring approaches](#). These approaches particularly make sense when cause and effect relationships are uncertain, when different stakeholders have such diverse perspectives that consensus may not be achievable, when contextual factors influence programming, or when new opportunities or needs arise.

### 7.3 Evaluation

The size of the evidence base for social and emotional skill development in contexts where USAID works does not yet match the size of the evidence base in the United States; however, it is growing. USAID’s policy commitment to social and emotional skills or soft skills for children and youth at all
levels of the education system, both formal and non-formal, requires focused investments in research and learning. USAID and implementing partners have the opportunity to make significant contributions to the global understanding of the use, significance, and sustainability of programming for social and emotional skills or soft skills and related outcomes.

**USAID’s Policy Brief on Social and Emotional Skills and Soft Skills** outlines key learning questions that can inform USAID Missions and implementing partners as they draft learning agendas at the activity level. Key questions reflect the USAID Office of Education’s [Learning Agendas](#) and include:

- What interventions effectively and cost-effectively improve learners’ social and emotional skills or soft skills, particularly in crisis- and conflict-affected contexts? What are the causal mechanisms through which interventions produce impacts? How can effective interventions be brought to scale in different education systems?
- What is the relationship between social and emotional skills and academic achievement over time, particularly for the most marginalized students, in stable or conflict and crisis-affected settings?
- How do gender, power, privilege, and culture interact with social and emotional skills or soft skills development? Are certain skills more meaningful to positive outcomes in some contexts than in others?
- How does a safe and inclusive learning environment influence the development of social and emotional skills or soft skills in all students, including those who are from marginalized groups?
- What are the most effective and cost-effective ways to measure social and emotional skills or soft skills for different types of learners, teachers, instructors, faculty, or caregivers? What are the most effective and cost-effective ways to measure implementation of interventions, specifically the way they are sequenced and children and youth’s exposure to various components of the intervention?
- How does technology enable effective social and emotional or soft skills programming?
- How do we best engage with higher education institutions to create contextually relevant research on how social and emotional skills or soft skills investments expand a country’s human capital and reinforce or amplify the impact of investments in education and youth workforce?
- How do higher education institutions best prepare a workforce of teachers, instructors, or faculty members to build social and emotional skills or soft skills for children and youth?

### 7.4 Learning and Adaptive Management

Many of the strategies discussed in this How-To Note also reflect principles of [collaborating, learning, and adapting](#). For example, deeply rooting social and emotional programming in the cultural context of a community (in order to identify relevant skills or competencies) requires collaboration, relationships of trust, and a strong understanding of context. Identifying factors that may promote, protect, or undermine social and emotional skill development at a classroom, facility, or community level requires a comprehensive analysis of the internal, external, or environmental risks, which can also drive scenario planning. Creating an equitable, conflict-sensitive social and emotional basic education program requires an intersectional analysis of the sources of marginalization and the ways in which marginalization may feed grievances.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


http://www.alliance.brown.edu/tdl/diversitykit.shtml


USAID. Checklist for Conflict Sensitivity in Education Programs.


## ANNEX 1. SUPPLEMENTAL-9 PIRS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Supp-9 Percent of learners with improved social and emotional skills, as locally defined, following participation in USG-assisted programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>Social and emotional skills can be cognitive, emotional, or social. Social and emotional skills refer to the demonstrable skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Social and emotional skills are developmental, linked to the age and stage of the beneficiary, and importantly, can be taught, practiced, and learned. The USAID Social and Emotional Learning and Soft Skills Education Policy Brief provides further definition and specifications to the 2018 USAID Education Policy. USAID does not identify a specific set of social and emotional skills that must be measured in order to use this indicator. It is most important that the skills measured by this indicator be culturally and contextually relevant and have a clear role in the theory of change. “Improved” means as a meaningfully higher composite score or better results at the end of the program, using a statistically reliable, locally validated measurement tool. The amount of increase that is meaningful will be determined and justified by the program, though some tools do have pre-determined values that constitute improvement. Baseline values should not be assumed to be 0 for this indicator. Assessment methodologies to generate the needed data may be cross-sectional or longitudinal. The choice of assessment methodology in part will depend on the nature of the social and emotional skills program. “Locally defined” means that both the social and emotional skills themselves and the definition of improvement should be grounded in the local context and validated by relevant stakeholders. The Explore SEL web-based tool provides examples of many different frameworks and skills and can be filtered by country. The program and its stakeholders should drive the selection of skills, the description of what those skills look like in practice for the context and target population, as well as what improvement looks like. The INEE Measurement Library and INEE PSS and SEL Measurement and Assessment Tools in Education in Emergencies can provide measurement tools and training or implementation guidance that have been used in particular countries/regions and with specific populations. A “learner who participated in a USG-assisted program” means an individual has participated to some extent in a structured program that aims to improve social and emotional skills. The individual may or may not have completed the program, and there may or may not be a certificate for completion. The program can be any type of program, formal or non-formal, as long as it has a specific strategy or approach to improving social and emotional skills and it received either technical or financial assistance from the U.S. government. Since social and emotional skills programming can vary widely in content and delivery, it is up to the program to specify and define the minimum level of participation required in order to count an individual as “participated” in the PIRS. The inclusive definition of participation may make this indicator useful for monitoring of social and emotional skills development for integrated or cross-sectoral programs. Please note for pre-primary learners, it is more appropriate to use supplemental indicator 1. For youth-serving programs, it is more appropriate to use EG.6-13 or YOUTH-1. “Percent of learners” is the number of individuals with a higher composite score or better results at post-test divided by the total number of individuals who participate in programming multiplied by 100. Calculation: numerator = number of individuals with improved skills denominator = number of individuals participating in programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Activities that rely on a sample of learners rather than a census to report results should sample to ensure representation of characteristics that are important for understanding differences in outcomes (e.g., geography, language, sex, displacement status, etc). Numerators and denominators, extrapolated onto the activity population, must be reported. In preparing for data analysis, each individual’s results should be counted only once, regardless of the number of programs in which the individual participated; when individuals participate in multiple social and emotional skills programs, endline assessments should occur at the end of the programming in which the individual participated. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Primary SPS Linkage</strong></th>
<th>ES.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linkage to Long-Term Outcome or Impact</strong></td>
<td>Social and emotional skills are measurable learning outcomes identified in the 2018 USAID Education Policy. Learners with strong social and emotional skills tend to perform better at school and be resilient to shocks or stresses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator Type</strong></td>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reporting Type</strong></td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Indicator</strong></td>
<td>This indicator will be used to evaluate the efficacy of USG-supported interventions in improving the social and emotional skills of targeted learners. This indicator will be used, along with other indicators, to report progress and achievements of education programming to Congress under the 2018 US Government Basic Education Strategy and the 2018 USAID Education Policy. USG agencies and USAID operating units can use the results reported under this indicator’s disaggregates to determine how best to target sub-populations. This indicator may also be used to describe progress against some other Agency-level priorities, such as resilience, because social and emotional skills are a resilience capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reporting Frequency</strong></td>
<td>Annual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Source</strong></td>
<td>Data may come from three sources: Official reports from an implementing partner Official government records, if they align with USG activity areas and targeted beneficiaries. Analysis of secondary data on learner outcomes, if the data aligns with USG activity areas and targeted beneficiaries. Social and emotional skills can be assessed through a variety of measurement tools and approaches. Appropriate approaches include: self-report, interview protocols, teacher/parent/peer/facilitator observation and rating, or performance-based assessments (e.g. games or a real world performance measure). This guidance provides an overview of the measurement approaches in social and emotional skill development (pages 14-17), and this guidance provides insight into the process of selecting or developing a tool. The following provides large libraries of measurement tools used in settings where USAID works: The MENAT Measurement Library provides a set of validated, reliable tools for use in the Middle East Region amongst crisis- and conflict-affected populations. The 2020 SEL and PSS Measurement and Assessment Tools in Education in Emergencies Report commissioned by INEE maps and analyzes tools currently in use to capture social and emotional learning outcomes in a variety of crisis- and conflict-affected settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bureau Owner(s)</strong></td>
<td>Agency: USAID Bureau and Office: E3/ED POC: Christopher Ying, Senior Education Data Specialist, Office of Education, 1-202-793-2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaggregate(s)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of males with improved social and emotional skills (numerator)</td>
<td>Number of males who participated in the activity (denominator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of females with improved social and emotional skills (numerator)</td>
<td>Number of females who participate in the activity (denominator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of females with a disability who participate in the activity (denominator)</td>
<td>Number of females with a disability who participate in the activity (denominator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of males with a disability who participate in the activity (denominator)</td>
<td>Number of males with a disability who participate in the activity (denominator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of females affected by crisis or conflict with improved social and emotional skills (numerator)</td>
<td>Number of females affected by crisis or conflict who participate in the activity (denominator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of males affected by crisis or conflict with improved social and emotional skills (numerator)</td>
<td>Number of males affected by crisis or conflict who participate in the activity (denominator)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of females affected by crisis or conflict who participate in the activity (denominator)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of males affected by crisis or conflict who participate in the activity (denominator)</td>
<td>Number of males affected by crisis or conflict who participate in the activity (denominator)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 All activities reporting on this indicator must report on sex disaggregates. Activities that rely on a sample of learners rather than a census to report results should sample to ensure representation of males and females.

2 The 2018 USAID Education Policy defines children and youth with disabilities as those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. All activities should report on this disaggregate, though only activities that are focused on improving the outcomes of individuals with disabilities must sample to ensure representation by disability status. This includes activities that identify individuals with disabilities as a target beneficiary or sub-beneficiary group. For example, activities that broadly support differentiated and inclusive instruction but do not target specific learning outcomes for individuals with disabilities need not sample specifically for disability status. Activities targeting individuals ages 15 and older should use the Washington Group Disability Questionnaire to collect this data. Refer to USAID Guidance on How to Collect Data on Disability for more information.

3 Please see the 2018 USAID Education Policy for definitions of “conflict-affected” and “crisis-affected.” Activities in which only some individuals are affected by crisis or conflict and that rely on a sample rather than a census of learners for data collection should sample to ensure representation of individuals affected by crisis and conflict.